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VOICES OF MIDLIFE TOMBOYS:
A NARRATIVE STUDY

by

Jan Secrist

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

University of San Diego

1996

Dissertation Committee

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ABSTRACT

VOICES OF MIDLIFE TOMBOYS: A NARRATIVE STUDY

Women's lives have been increasingly researched in the last thirty years, offering greater understanding of their roles and relationships within our patriarchal culture. It is now readily understood that adolescence tends to mute the positive sense of self and authentic voice of young girls in our current culture, and midlife tends to relax these restrictions, allowing self and voice to emerge once again. Many women in their middle years rediscover the spirited, independent, and competent identity left behind when they accepted cultural restrictions to conform to a world that was not of their own making.

In spite of the increased knowledge about women's lives, however, virtually no studies have concentrated on the cultural experiences of tomboy women. Tomboys have been defined as cultural rebels for over six centuries, yet their personal stories have not been studied to identify their patterns of acceptance or resistance to social restrictions. The purpose of this study was to gather and analyze narratives of the historical events and challenges of ten midlife heterosexual tomboy women in an effort to better understand their life choices. The four original questions were organized around the specific life events of being childhood tomboys, navigating adolescence, selecting careers, and experiencing midlife.

This qualitative research method involved a reflective narrative process which encouraged personal life stories to emerge in three ways: oral interviews,

individual selection of a photograph or creative art piece that reflected how they felt about having lived their lives as tomboys, and written description interpreting their representative art. These stories were then woven into themes in an effort to create a mosaic of their common experiences.

The portraits that emerged from this study supported cultural tomboy traditions of independence and a refusal to be squelched either physically or mentally. Their childhoods were free and independent, but adolescence was difficult for some primarily because they no longer were allowed to roam freely in the male world, and they did not want to live in the female world. Their competitive strengths and love of physical expression could not be contained for long, however, and they regained their strong sense of self in early adulthood.

These tomboys shared a light-hearted and irreverent humor, continued high level of energy in their midlife years, an enthusiasm for their maverick natures, and a firm determination to maintain an authentic voice that has been a tomboy trademark for hundreds of years. It appears the Tomboy Archetype not only survives, but continues to thrive in spite of cultural pressures. For these women, being a tomboy is a lifetime identity they hold with great pride.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the ten enthusiastic and energetic tomboy women who so generously shared their personal lives with me. Their high spirits, willingness to explore past and current experiences, and never-ending humor gave exceptional depth to these narratives. Their voices have encouraged the research to continue far into the future.

I also dedicate this research to past, present and future tomboys of all ages who long to have their voices heard, their stories validated, and their lives honored.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thank you to the many outstanding professors and support staff of the University of San Diego, all of whom contributed to my growth and development in this program. Writing a dissertation is definitely a team collaboration, and I had a terrific multi-talented team: Johanna Hunsaker, Ph.D., Director, Kathleen T. Heinrich, Ph.D., and Susan Zgliczynski, Ph.D.

This committee offered the best present of all: they allowed me the freedom to pursue my dream within academic parameters, respected and responded quickly to my sense of urgency and tight timetable, and offered hearty doses of encouragement to speak out in my own authentic voice.

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To my dependable AA (Attitude Adjustment) friends Debbie and Jacque, I thank you for the shared laughter, the common sense that occasionally prevailed, the fun and nonsense and food and incredible support and friendship. We have a hilarious past. Let's see what we can stir up for the future.

To my J3 Starbucks Study-Buddies Jacque and Julie, in rain, snow (well, it felt like it) and sunshine, thanks for being there! I could always count on you to drink hot mochas, argue theory, brainstorm methodologies, laugh, and offer encouragement. Let's go back to Starbucks and *relax* for a change.

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To D.L., my supportive, patient, and understanding husband, who cheerfully folded 1001 loads of laundry and ate buckets of take out food while I fiddled on the computer, I promise to share all home duties with cheery smiles. Your great ideas, sudden brainstorms, and constant encouragement--"You are only ten feet from the top of the mountain, hang in there!"-- were terrific. A million thanks!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE	1
Significance of the Study	9
Purpose of the Study	9
Research Questions	10
Definition of Terms	11
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	12
Generational Issues of Midlife Women	18
Female Communication Style	27
Voice	28
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	35
Research Design	36
Participant Selection	37
Data Collection	39
Data Analysis	41
Protection of Human Subjects	44
Limitations	45
CHAPTER FOUR: CONTENT ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS	47
Introduction	47
Participants	50
Fury	51
Michael	51
Annie Oakley	51
Sinclair	52
Sydney	53
Sarah	53
Elizabeth	54
Lynn	55
Sue	56
JB	57
Frameworks of Meaning	58
Defining Tomboy	58
Physical Activity and Competition	63
Identity As Tomboy	73
Social Norms	78

CHAPTER FOUR (continued)	
Relationships	83
Family of Origin	84
Peers	97
Career Choices/Coworkers	104
One Foot in Each World: Balance	116
Memorable Moments in Life Stages	130
Pre-Adolescence	133
Adolescence	135
Early Adulthood	145
Midlife	149
Conclusion	155
CHAPTER FIVE: IN THEIR OWN WORDS	158
Fury	159
Michael	161
Annie Oakley	162
Sinclair	166
Sydney	168
Sarah	170
Lynn	172
JB	174
CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	179
Introduction	179
Morgan: A Composite Tomboy	179
Summary of Findings	187
Childhood, Adolescence	187
Early Adulthood	188
Midlife	189
Summary of Objectives	191
Implications	193
Recommendations	202
Conclusion	209
REFERENCES	211
APPENDIXES	220
A. Demographics of Participants	220
B. Human Subjects Consent Form	221
C. Questions	222
D. Letter to Participants	224

CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Introduction

The role of women in contemporary society has expanded dramatically in the last few decades, with new opportunities for personal and professional growth becoming available in many different areas of life. These increasing opportunities have spelled a change in the gender make-up of previously all male conclaves in business, medicine, law, politics, education, and many other arenas (Aburdene & Naisbett, 1992; Cantor & Bernay, 1992). These changes are encouraging members of the American culture to re-examine cultural and social expectations for both men and women.

The prescribed roles for American women, in particular, have undergone dramatic changes, most noticeably beginning with the women's movement of the 1960s, and continuing into the 1990s. There is every reason to believe that the prescribed social roles for males and females will continue to merge, slowly erasing the firm boundaries that have formed the rigid social structure of our lives until the present time.

We are expanding these cultural restrictions by increasing our knowledge of the roles and expectations of the men and women who make up our network of communities and work force. We have increasing data available to encourage us to look within ourselves for individual decisions about our make-up and

talents, and to look outside ourselves, to other communities and cultures, to help us meet future challenges by re-defining who we are and where we'd like to go.

One of the ways we can do this is to take an honest look at the cultural boundaries placed on Anglo-Saxon men and women and be willing to re-define both male and female roles and contributions to society. In spite of the current conservative clamor for a return to formerly restricted social roles, when the rules seemed simpler and sex roles were more sharply defined, turning backwards for easy answers is just as naively unrealistic as trying to ignore or cancel our technological advances. In order to maximize our health as individuals and as a country we must strive to keep up with our ever-changing environment and examine how to best nurture community members, encouraging the survivability of the next generations (Eisler, 1987; Harman, 1988; Noddings, 1984).

These future adjustments will come from social movements, education institutions, and public and private service organizations, and will be dramatically affected by the inclusion of women at all levels of organizations and the willingness to adopt an open, honest style of communication that builds an awareness of healthy interactions and natural strengths (Jamieson, 1995; Reardon, 1995). National and community positions of influence are no longer exclusively male; many women are breaking down the doors of middle management positions, a few have broken through the glass ceiling to executive offices of large corporations, and others are creating their own companies, revising educational opportunities, and demonstrating unique capabilities for personal and professional growth (Aburdene & Naisbett, 1992; Astin & Leland,

1991; Gilligan, 1982b). Some believe women offer a cooperative work style that is not the traditional male, hierarchical, top-down style of managing people but instead focuses on a collaborative, interactive style of shared decision-making that recognizes diverse talents and styles (Astin & Leland, 1991; Mitchell, 1992; Rosener, 1990). These women share concerns for unity and cohesion within a group and encourage an environment of free-flowing exchange of ideas and communication. Helgeson (1990) describes this cohesive process as a web, where organization members can connect with others at all levels.

The movement toward more open communication and sensitivity to others has often been reported by males in their middle years, and midlife is commonly described as an opportunity for personal reflection and re-evaluation of roles and talents for both men and women. Many midlife males no longer feel the need to prove themselves, and begin to search out what feels natural and authentic to each individual and what legacy they choose to leave to future generations (Erikson, 1959; Gould, 1978; Guttman, 1987; Keen, 1991). The middle years for women often bring greater acceptance of themselves and a strong desire to create a new and more independent, authentic identity (Freidan, 1993; Mann, 1994; Rountree, 1993; Sheehy, 1995; Steinem, 1992). Although each developmental researcher seems to have his or her own definition of middle age by enclosing this time in number limits or developmental stages, most agree the midlife range falls between 40 and 60. Sheehy (1995) recently divided these years into decades, labeling them the Flourishing Forties (Middlescence), the Flaming Fifties (Age of Mastery), and the Serene Sixties (Age of Integrity). Many

individuals, however, often use personal frames of reference for defining their own middle age, depending on the outside influences of children living at home or on their own, aging parents, health concerns, work attitudes, or even a change in physical appearance or desire for new personal challenges (Freidan, 1993).

Women approaching this time of life often experience a growing sense of freedom from culturally subordinating roles and begin to eagerly explore new avenues of personal expression (Bateson, 1989; Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Helgeson, 1990; Rountree, 1993; Sheehy, 1995). Research of middle class working women has established that many women, upon reaching midlife, regain strong voices of courage, authenticity, and a new sense of independence (Loden, 1985; Morrison, 1992; Rosener, 1990).

Women who reach their middle years often rediscover an earlier identity, that of the spirited, independent, and competent girl left behind when each woman accepted the premise that her adult identity was not to be of her own making, but was firmly attached to the male dominated world (Hancock, 1989). As Hancock wrote, "At the buried core of women's identity is a distinct and vital self first articulated in childhood, a root identity that gets cut off in the process of growing up female" (p.3). The loss of this girlhood identity has been chronicled in recent years by many researchers, including Brown and Gilligan (1992), Gilligan, Rogers and Tolman (1991), Pipher (1994), and Mann (1994). Pipher describes this loss as a transition in which girls are forced to abandon their identity as independent individuals to become objects of male attention. "Girls become 'female impersonators' who fit their whole selves into small, crowded

spaces. Vibrant, confident girls become shy, doubting young women. Girls stop thinking, 'Who am I? What do I want?' and start thinking, 'What must I do to please others?'" (Pipher, 1994; p. 22).

Women who struggled with these issues in adolescence discover the same questions often reappear in middle years, and once again they are faced with decisions about adopting or abandoning cultural expectations about personal appearance, devotion to others, loss of self-identity, and little (or no) opportunity to establish a sense of authenticity. Pipher (1994) defined authenticity as, "an 'owning' of all experience, including emotions and thoughts that are not socially acceptable" (p. 83). Thus authentic adult women are able to freely experience emotions and feelings and accept themselves for who they are instead of letting others define their identity. Each woman must decide for herself if she is going to reclaim her original authenticity or maintain the subordinate role our culture dictated to her when she reached late childhood or early adolescence.

Although these middle year challenges have been studied with increasing frequency in recent years, one group experiencing a loss of sense of self and identity that has not been well chronicled is that of midlife tomboys. A literature search has produced virtually no information on the identity issues facing midlife heterosexual women who consider themselves to have been tomboys in the earlier years. Personal conversations and informal questions have revealed to me that these midlife women, who consider themselves to have been tomboys, struggled greatly with the culturally forced change in identity and behavior during

adolescence. They felt there was no place for them in the male or the female world. They strongly rebelled against abandoning their independent ways, not wanting to adopt a feminine (primarily subordinate, usually silent) model dictated by the rules of a patriarchal society, and obviously unable to be male. It was a choice many of these women still regret (personal communications, May, 1995).

Between menarche and menopause the cultural expectations appear to take control of many women's lives, but the first signs of menopause seem to trigger the desire to break through traditional boundaries and reclaim the strong, assertive, and influential voices of their earlier years (Greer, 1991; Sheehy, 1993). Many women eagerly join others in creating positive changes within themselves as well as influencing others (Rountree, 1993; Sheehy, 1995; Steinem, 1992). These women often choose to combine new challenges while keeping the treasured, nurturing parts of their lives, and discover an openness to new experiences and the integration of new and varied roles (Bateson, 1989).

These new and challenging roles are impacting the work environment at all levels as women continue to enter the work force in unprecedented numbers (Aburdene & Naisbett, 1992). This more balanced gender population has not gone unnoticed; many current authors are indirectly (or directly) championing the need for positive, interactive relationships, mutual respect and understanding, recognition of the uniqueness of individual talents, and the traditional female attributes of supporting and nurturing others (Astin & Leland, 1991; Berquist, 1993; Hendrickson, Jeffries & Rost, 1989; Mitchell, 1992). Some researchers feel the current emphasis on competition and aggression has gone on so long

that we are now teetering on the brink of nuclear oblivion, and they have been far-sighted enough to recognize the critical need for cooperation among nations as well as between individuals, genders, and communities (Eisler, 1987; Harmon, 1988; Noddings, 1984). Thus the interactions of our community and national survival can no longer focus exclusively on the language of competition but also must include the language of collaboration and cooperation.

The language of cooperation is a language that many women speak easily and comfortably, for cooperation and collaboration have formed the foundation of their cultural training since birth (Miller, 1986). For centuries the male voice has dictated societal rules and rituals, and the female voice has remained essentially silent in our patriarchal society. In spite of recent advances by women, our religious, educational, political, legal, and corporate structures remain firmly dominated by white men. Many researchers feel, however, that our future is going to depend on full inclusion of women's voices and talents to balance our need for a cooperative and caring society (Astin & Leland, 1989; Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Eisler, 1987; Jamieson, 1995; Mann, 1994; Reardon, 1995; Sheehy, 1995). Helgeson (1990) supports the inclusion of women's talents, as many women have an inherent ability to "[Bridge] the gap between the demands of efficiency and the need to nurture the human spirit" (p. 234).

Since most women achieve their identity and come to know themselves primarily through relationships with others, the concepts of interdependence and collaboration come more naturally from their experience (Gilligan, 1982a). The male-oriented workplace focusing on competition and individual achievement is

often stressful for many women, who would rather share success than be the solitary achiever (Gilligan, 1982a; Helgeson, 1990; Jamieson, 1995). These discoveries open the door for women to more fully explore their psychological growth and potential in both personal and professional relationships.

The respected research into women's psychological issues and development offers a dynamic opportunity to examine the effect cultural subordination has had on women throughout their lifetime, and provides a provocative context for researching the experiences of a particular group, that of midlife women. These women are the vanguard of American women who have burst through traditional cultural boundaries in significant numbers and are achieving success in many professional positions of responsibility. They have had to create knowledgeable voices of their own that reflect their own style of working with others, and have learned to respect and value their collaborative styles of communication (Glass, 1992; Tannen, 1994).

These styles incorporate the lifelong knowledge that the nurturing and empowerment of others is a life focus, and by strengthening others, women often strengthen themselves (Estes, 1992). Women often speak of "voice" as a metaphor for this strengthening process. Voice becomes a synonym for one's ability to unite inner convictions with outer actions in both personal and professional relationships. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) described these women as having a "contextual knowledge. . . they strive to translate their moral commitments to action, out of a conviction that 'one must act' and out of a feeling of responsibility to the larger community in which they

live" (p.150). The women interviewed in Helgeson's (1990) study often mentioned that their voice reflected the essence of who they are, and their language style was a powerful motivating force for inspiration and collaboration.

A fuller understanding of women's experiences as heterosexual tomboys and the development of their professional voices can best come from the experiences of current midlife women who are willing to explore how their voices, sense of authenticity, and identity have developed and are currently being expressed.

Significance of the Study

As women's social roles and professional opportunities continue to expand, new knowledge about women will add to the understanding of the impact of cultural forces and perhaps encourage others to develop a stronger sense of personal identity and authenticity. This study will focus on midlife tomboys, thus contributing to our growing body of knowledge of the first generation of women to have extensive opportunities for professional and personal growth in many facets of society. This knowledge will offer new insights to younger women as they move into adulthood. Since our society's roles are increasingly shared by both genders, I believe that the insights garnered from these interviews will encourage others, men and women, to explore their own lives, examine their experiences, and be encouraged to structure their own mutually supportive relationships in both personal and professional lives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and challenges

of ten heterosexual women who consider themselves to have been tomboys in late childhood or in early adolescence, who are currently in what they define as midlife, and are working in a paid professional environment. Although I did not specify ethnicity, socio-economic status or education as a requirement of this selection process, the participants were all Caucasian, middle class, and with a college (or advanced) degree. My objectives were threefold: (1) to obtain a descriptive narrative from each woman in an attempt to interpret the influences on her personal growth through this stage in her life; (2) to examine experiential themes that emerge from these experiences as (or if) these women feel they have moved beyond gender-based cultural boundaries or have reclaimed their feelings of self-ownership; and (3) to create a portrait of these midlife women that helps us understand their experiences as they journeyed from adolescent tomboys to midlife women.

Research Questions

My research concentrated on the following areas of inquiry:

1. What does being a tomboy mean to you?
2. How was your journey into adolescence influenced by being a tomboy?
3. How is your journey into midlife being influenced by your being a tomboy?
4. What influence did being a tomboy have on your choice of career and the direction your career has taken?

Additional questions included how these events affected the women's sense of identity, how being a tomboy influenced their personal and professional

relationships, and how the changes impacted their personal sense of authenticity.

Definition of Terms

The women in this project defined themselves as being in midlife and as having been tomboys in their early or adolescent years. There are many varying definitions of both "midlife" and "tomboy," and although I chose to allow these to be self-defining terms for each woman, a basic definition of each term is given here along with the definition of voice.

Midlife: A time when both genders often begin to examine priorities, question cultural roles, and explore non-traditional paths of interest (Sheehy, 1995). Midlife is a time when many women, in particular, begin to reclaim a sense of their own identity to "come together with a new sense of themselves as women" (Miller, 1986a, p. xv). For the purposes of this study midlife includes the ages 40-60.

Tomboy: A girl who behaves like a spirited or boisterous boy; a wild, romping girl (American Dictionary of the English Language, 1990).

Voice: A metaphor many women use that applies to varied aspects of female experience, development, and point of view. Voice is used as the opposite of being silenced, either by being ignored or feeling unable to speak one's mind. Other connotations apply to having a sense of positive self-worth, a voiced connection to others, an ability to intertwine voice, mind and self, and the determination to escape cultural restrictions to create one's own frame of reference (Belenky et al., 1986; Estes, 1992; Helgeson, 1990).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

During the early 1900s there was little research being conducted that investigated the lives and experiences of women. For many generations culturally structured gender roles have encouraged men to strive for autonomy, individuality and personal success, but women's lives were restricted to the private sphere and concentrated in the home, with their typical working experience devoted to child care, teaching, or nursing. Early research and academic curiosity seldom, if ever, examined women's concerns, and if addressing women at all, it was usually to denounce them as weak, incapable of any meaningful work, clearly the inferior sex often incapacitated by their hormones (Greer, 1991).

The common attitude toward women in the 1800s was, "Women are directly fitted for acting as the nurses and teachers of our early childhood by the fact that they are themselves childish, frivolous and short-sighted; in a word, they are big children all their life long" (Schopenhauer, 1928, p. 136). Schopenhauer (1928) also claimed that "women are defective in the powers of reasoning and deliberation . . . traceable to the position in which Nature has assigned to them as the weaker sex" (p. 141). Darwin (n.d.) encouraged this thinking in one of his early writings when he wrote that "man is more courageous, pugnacious, and

energetic than woman and has a more universal genius" (p. 867).

Education for women was limited to the domestic arts with ridicule flowing from pulpits, social institutions and educational facilities onto those who proposed otherwise. "Girls only needed enough math to set the table and count her 10-12 children; enough charm to boil water and geography only to count the number of rooms in her house--that's the only learning a woman needs" (Merriam, 1971, p. 12). The jokes abounded that the only degree a respectable woman needed was R. W., standing for Respectable Wife, or that of M.P.M, Mistress of Pudding Making (Merriam, 1971.) Ward (1903), considered the founder of American Sociology, called himself the original supporter of a "gynocentric view. In remote history women were venerated because males were unaware of their own role in reproduction. When men finally figured it out, they overthrew women's predominant position in a profound social revolution" (p. 296). Ward added that the strength of males, and their lack of sentimentality and sympathy, created the complete subordination of women.

Although these attitudes may seem out-dated and unreasonable to us now, the effects of this profound subordination of women can still be found in much of our culture today (Coontz, 1992; Keen, 1991; Krueger, 1984; Mann, 1994; Miller, 1986a). The bulk of psychological research remains focused on the male model of development. "If and when scientists turn to the study of women, they typically look for ways in which women conform to or diverge from patterns found in the study of men . . . attributes traditionally associated with the masculine are valued, studied, and articulated, while those associated with the

feminine tend to be ignored" (Belenky et al; p. 6). One noted exception to this pattern was Carl Jung (1923), whose development of psychological types included males and females, offering explanations of fundamental individual differences that govern behavior.

Bernice Neugarten (1968) stands out as an early researcher who offered a comprehensive picture of the norms and internalized social roles that encompass both male and female lives, and attached the concept of social status to each stage. Neugarten's work is significant because she opened the door to cultural expectations and the inclusion of female experiences as worthy of study and consideration. Roger Gould (1972) was one of the early male researchers who formulated a concept of seven life development stages and included growth patterns that incorporated women's viewpoints and life challenges. Gail Sheehy (1976) continued exploring adult development in her book entitled *Passages*, breaking the stages into decades with full inclusion of both male and female personal stories and life patterns to illustrate common themes of change. Guttman (1987) felt that the fifties age range began to include a willingness for both genders to soften rigid role expectations, with males often more willing to accept supportive roles and women moving comfortably into authority and leadership positions.

Literature that focused exclusively on midlife women was rare, and research focusing on midlife heterosexual tomboys appears almost nonexistent. The few studies focusing on tomboys are from a scientific, physiological focus, such as the study by Money and Ehrhardt (1972), or sex-role stereotyping, as

discussed by Rivers, Barnett and Baruch (1979). Money and Erhardt reviewed girls who had received high levels of androgen, a masculinizing hormone, while in utero. This higher level of male hormone was thought to produce tomboys who pursue rigorous physical activities throughout their childhoods. This biological tomboy definition by Money and Erhardt (1972) included

a high level of physical energy-expenditure, especially in vigorous outdoor play, games and sport; a preference for male over female playmates; a preference for practical clothing and an indifference to personal adornment; a lack of interest in dolls; little rehearsal of the traditional role of wife and mother; a late interest in boyfriends and dating; and, eventually, a subordination of marriage to a career.

(pp. 102-108)

This research was highly criticized, especially by feminist researchers, for a lack of consideration of cultural influences, the sexist language and underlying assumptions, but it continued to be quoted in scientific circles as definitive on the subject. Although biological research of gender traits causes consternation among many social researchers, the resulting information may help to explain the extensive range of behavior among men and women. The purpose should be to understand and accept a wide range of behavior and not label certain activities or interests as abnormal or unacceptable. As Ann Hall, Physical Educator at the University of Alberta, pointed out, the word tomboy is culturally and negatively laden as it tends to label certain girls as acting abnormally, when "there is no reason at all why the characteristics and activities and interests of

tomboys should not be seen as normal processes of growing up" (Ann Hall, personal communication, December, 1995).

The definition of the word "tomboy" seems to have undergone some revisions since the first known reference as reported by Grahn (1984), but has remained fairly consistent with Money and Erhardt's (1972) definition in the last two centuries. Grahn wrote

tomboy is an old, and perhaps spirit-based word, for one of the witches persecuted in England in the 13th Century who was accused by the authorities of having an imp or spirit, in the form of a gray cat whose name was Tomboy. (p. 147-148)

Ann Hall (1996) said, "It is my understanding that 16th Century usage of 'tomboy' referred to a boy--particularly a rude, boisterous boy--who acted much like a tom (a generic term for anything male)." By the 17th Century the word was used for women who were wild or immodest. The American Dictionary of English Language (1990) condensed these definitions by referring to a tomboy as "a girl who behaves like a spirited or boisterous boy, a wild romping girl, a hoyden."

Rivers et al. (1979) included a chapter about tomboys in their book about women's development, which focused primarily on the sex-role studies of the time. They discussed the problem of theory not meshing with reality, and that focusing on sex-role traits only leads to stereotyping. Thus the word tomboy implies a girl who has invaded male territory. By being labeled a tomboy, a girl is "sort of a mutant, different from others of her species. The word can be an insult

or a badge worn proudly" (p. 109). To be defined within the boundaries of a specific behavioral repertoire exacts the price of the individual sacrificing other modes of behavior, often forcing one side underground. Rivers et al. reported that many studies regarded an active female child, a tomboy, as abnormal and cautioned that such vigorous activity was dangerous to her emotional and physical health. Many people make the assumption that tomboyism is synonymous with being a lesbian, yet a study by Hyde, Rosenberg and Behrman (1974) concluded just the opposite, that physical activity is normal for all children, and heterosexual tomboys are neither abnormal nor a minority.

Most other literature on women during the 1950s and 1960s primarily addressed working women, stressing they adopt the 'typical' male managerial styles of keeping employees off-balance, focusing on the need for competition and the acquisition of individual power (Helgeson, 1990). Women were advised to play the business game by men's rules if they wanted to achieve leadership roles (Krebs, 1993; Helgeson, 1990).

The central concepts that have emerged from the research are that women lead lives that have been traditionally subordinate, primarily focused in support of others. Women construct lives based on a connectedness to others, immersed in a network of relationships, with a lifelong value system of nurturance and care (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982a; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Miller, 1986a; Noddings, 1984).

With these concepts in mind, I will review the literature in three areas pertaining to women's development of midlife voice: (1) generational issues of

current midlife women; (2) female styles of communication; and (3) development of voice in midlife women.

Generational Issues of Current Midlife Women

Women currently in their midlife years are part of a pivotal generation that has experienced tremendous social changes. They are what Erica Jong (1994) referred to as "the whiplash generation" (p. xix). Raised to believe they could be a modern Cinderella, economically and emotionally dependent on their mates, many believed marriage would solve not only their current problems, but all future problems as well (Dowling, 1981). Children's literature, television programming, movies, and educational influences continue to reaffirm this subordinate role for young girls; their cultural assignments are to be virtuous, silent, pretty, ladylike, and married (Mann, 1994).

Adolescence for current midlife women was just as traumatic as it has been for many girls throughout the ages, particularly the girls who led independent, strong-minded and confident lives until the culture closed in on them and forced acceptance of their future vocation as females (Pipher, 1994). Although many of these girls considered themselves tomboys, there is no literature that reports independent studies focusing on former tomboys now in midlife. Occasionally a reference will be made to tomboys, but only in brief, tantalizing sentences. For instance, Gail Sheehy's (1995) most recent book, *New Passages*, reported that many of the midlife women she interviewed, when asked to describe their late childhood, often began to cry. Sheehy (1995) wrote, "The wrenching change from the freewheeling, funny, even fearless tomboys

they once were, before being initiated into what Anna Quindlen calls the 'cult of the nice girl,' is revived in all its painful intensity, and perhaps for the first time the awful price is calculated" (p. 221). Sheehy (1995) referred to these girls as "Self Seekers" who lived earlier lives of physical and emotional freedom. Once adolescence and society close in, however, the girls close down their voices. It appears from the literature search that adolescent girls have been increasingly studied in the last several decades, but the girls who considered themselves to be tomboys have not been singled out for research.

The current generation of midlife women--whether tomboys or not--emerged from high school or college to discover a world suddenly experiencing cultural upheavals and freedoms generated by the birth control pill, the Women's Movement, and the Equal Rights Amendment. Even with advanced degrees, however, the primary positions in the 1960s that were open to women remained as a teacher, librarian, nurse, or social worker (Walker & Mehr, 1992). These roles fit the cultural expectations of this generation, and most women accepted their options with minimal argument (Mann, 1994; Rhode, 1993).

Perhaps the women accepted their assignments readily because they fit the description of being in the group labeled the Silent Generation by Sheehy (1995). These women, born between the years of 1930 and 1945, are generally characterized as being good, responsible, excellent mediators, and the last cohort group, for the most part, to respect authority. As Sheehy wrote, "This was (also) the earliest marrying and the earliest baby-making generation in American history" (p. 30). Other descriptions of this cohort group include being

unimaginative, passive, withdrawn, and without a rebellious cause. Sheehy also reported, however, that this generation was not truly silent. Many were active in ground-breaking changes in the civil rights movement and produced the most powerful names connected with the women's movement. When these women reached their 30s, they began to return to professional schools, enter politics, and break down barriers in television broadcasting and journalism in unprecedented numbers.

Women born into Sheehy's (1995) next generation, which she labeled the Vietnam Generation, born between 1946-1955, were the first wave of Baby Boomers. Sheehy referred to them as highly individualistic and expecting that everything would get better than it had been in the past. Strong women began making their appearance onto the national consciousness, women like Angela Davis, Joan Baez, Oprah Winfrey, Hillary Rodham Clinton. Many young women moved into communes, discovered drugs, and sought spiritual leaders for direction. Others began knocking at the doors of--and were admitted to--prestigious graduate schools. They tended to marry later than the previous generations.

During the 1970s, when the Silent Generation women were in their thirties and the Vietnam Generation women in their 20s, the emerging research began to reveal a deeper exploration and acceptance of the different life experiences women have in the American culture. Psychologists and feminist scholars became interested in the varied and complex dimensions unique to women's lives, and realized that women's lives were so different they could not possibly fit

into the traditional stage development theories espoused by most male authors. Women's developmental stages, value systems, ethical codes, connective experiences, communication styles, and varying life challenges were becoming respected topics for research (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1986a; Gould, 1972; Hargreaves, 1975; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Some researchers focused a portion of their research primarily on the life-span developmental issues of women and offered both information and validation of these experiences (Chodorow, 1959; Erikson, 1959; Livson, 1976; Miller, 1986b; Neugarten, 1968; Rubin, 1979; Sheehy, 1976, 1985). Others, like Brown and Gilligan (1992), Hancock (1989) and O'Reilly (1994) extended their research to preadolescent and adolescent girls to explore early female development.

This growing interest in and acceptance of the value of women's experiences continued as the pool of knowledge expanded. By the mid 1980s researchers began to publish significant findings about women's experiences. Krueger (1984) explored the psychological changes midlife women need to make when returning to a career after raising a family: "The major tasks confronted and worked through by women in this midlife return to work are the final steps of separation-individuation toward autonomy" (p. 115). The women, having met cultural expectations of wife and mother, could begin to renew their psychic development in positions outside the home. The obstacles women face in a return to work are emotional pressures from society, family, and friends to remain at home or to participate only in volunteer activities--the activities considered acceptable by the cultural boundaries (Krueger, 1984). Thus women

moving into professional occupations may face the challenges of having family and friends withdraw emotional support or encouragement.

Besides the potential loss of emotional support, some women lack the confidence to compete in their chosen work and, if successful, often harbor the feeling of being an imposter or a fraud (McIntosh, 1995). Women, particularly professional women, often question their right to their current success, and doubt they have the ability to sustain accomplishments. Some report hostile, negative reactions to their successes, and feel a powerful backlash when breaking traditional boundaries of cultural subordination (Faludi, 1991; Krueger, 1984).

An earlier and more positive focus on women's abilities was offered by Sheehy (1985) who researched female stage theories originally developed by Levinson but expanded her research to focus on women. Her book, *Pathfinders*, offered developmental stage terminology and psychological concepts that reached a wide audience and fueled the expanding interest in women's lives. Traditional aspects of women's experiences, primarily female talents for relationship, connection, and collaboration, were offered as a positive contribution to society by Bolen (1994), Gilligan (1982a), Jordan et al., (1991), Miller (1984b), Noddings (1984), and Tannen (1990). Bolen (1984) encouraged women to examine their own inner patterns which account for the differences in the choices women make, determining if they are women who prefer marriage and a family for their personal fulfillment, women who are goal-oriented and highly value their independence, or are among those women who enjoy the challenges of creating new experiences. The fact that Bolen offers a range of

accepted behaviors, including many others not elaborated on here, indicates a more accepting view of the different choices women make.

Gilligan (1982a) proposed that moral development in women is different from that of men, and is focused on an ethic of care rather than focused primarily on an ethic of justice. "Relationships. . . particularly issues of dependency, are experienced differently by women and men. . . . Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation" (p. 8).

Jordan et al (1991) compiled and published writings from the Stone Center that offered the relational and collaborative nature of women's psychology, including discussion of such traits as empathy, reciprocity, emotional and cognitive interrelatedness, and an awareness of growth within relationships. These are felt to be vital female growth patterns as women grow to experience a sense of themselves in relation to their world.

Miller (1984), a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, offered a substantial examination of women's psychological development and areas that are critical for women's development. These include an explanation of the cultural domination-subordination model of our culture and the resulting strengths, weaknesses, and emotional and relational issues that face women daily. "Women, more easily than men, can believe that any activity is more satisfying when it takes place in the context of relationships to other human being--and even more so when it leads to the enhancement of others. Women *know* this in

a way that men do not" (p. 54).

Noddings (1984) expanded on Gilligan's moral development of women in *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Noddings stressed that women can and do act in hierarchical and logical ways, as men do, but are not restricted to that form alone. Noddings wrote that, "there is no reason why men should not embrace (a feminine view). It is feminine in the deep classical sense--rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness" (p.2). Noddings stressed that this is an alternative view deserving equal consideration.

Tannen (1990) approached the concern of women for relationships and collaboration when she discussed communication styles of both genders and how the differences were reflected in their language styles. Tannen believed men and women come from different worlds and express themselves with different words, and that the asymmetry would be improved if each gender recognized differences and tried to bridge the gaps. "Many women could learn from men to accept some conflict and difference without seeing it as a threat to intimacy, and many men could learn from women to accept interdependence without seeing it as a threat to their freedom" (Tannen, 1990, p. 294).

Many of these issues are inspiring more research because of the increase of women in the work place and the increase of communication technology. Women who rode the wave of advancing technology, recognizing the career opportunities in the societal change from an industrial base to an information society, still felt the social pressures to remain subordinated, non-assertive, and content with middle management levels in work (Krebs, 1993; Miller, 1986b;

Walker & Mehr, 1992). Convinced by experience that they have to be better in order to be equal, women currently in the midlife age group have often worked doubly hard to break down the gender barriers in board rooms and executive offices. These women were the ground-breakers for the current significant number of women in professional schools or with successful self-owned businesses (Aburdene & Naisbett, 1992; Miller, 1986a). They are also the first ones to face a strong backlash from these 1980s advances, frequently reminded that "women's ways--our focus on relationship, our emotions, our intuition, and our cyclical biology--are deemed unacceptable in the masculine work world" (Krebs, 1993, p. 4). These women often began their careers by emulating the male models of success such as enforcing hierarchal attitudes, adopting adversarial positions, and learning a blood-thirsty style of winning at all costs (Mann, 1994). Women who followed these models found themselves climbing the professional ladder, but felt personal losses--they complained of having no energy, space or time left to care for themselves, and felt silenced both personally and professionally (Astin & Leland, 1989). It is interesting to note that this is not solely a women's issue, but a common adult theme for both males and females in which many midlife adults examine priorities, question roles, and feel frustrations from impersonal corporate environments (Sheehy, 1976, 1985).

Women's growth in professional opportunities has been like a roller coaster ride, sometimes up, sometimes down. In spite of the downward slides, and occasional sudden stops, however, many of these women have been able to reclaim a sense of their own identity, and in doing so have discovered increasing

social acceptance. These women eventually "have come together with a new sense of themselves as women" (Miller, 1986a, p. xv). This new sense of self often did not emerge, in this generation, until midlife experiences or issues created--or sometimes forced--new opportunities for personal growth (Bolen, 1984; Estes, 1992; Greer, 1991; Jong, 1994).

Aburdene and Naisbett (1992) sang the praises of the accomplishments of today's women, but also pointed out the many professions and religious orders in which women continue to be barred from executive positions because of their gender. Educational institutions now claim equal enrollments, but the educational experience is still firmly under the control of males. Alice Hayes (1993), President of the University of San Diego, wrote about the continuing male control of higher education: "Women students come into institutions where the imagery and environment still reflect male history and traditions, where most of the decisions are still made by men, the faculty is mostly men" (p. 11).

In spite of the bumpy hurdles, however, the advances women have made in all arenas are continuing to progress in a mostly forward direction. The interest, research, and publication of many studies of women's development continue to increase the growing body of knowledge about women's development and experience.

Female Communication Styles

Studies on the differences between male and female communication styles have become so popular they can be found in current books, academic journals, newspapers, and television programs. The message is written in many

different formats and with different slants, but the basic information is the same: Women's communication style is different from the male style, and is a result of both nature and nurture (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Pool, 1994).

The "nature" discussions center primarily on the influence of hormones, which are felt to have a dramatic impact on fetal brain development. All fetuses, at conception, are female; at 6-7 weeks of age the male hormone, testosterone, is injected into the brain by the hypothalamus, if the fetus is genetically programmed as a male (Pool, 1994). Many researchers feel this infusion of testosterone accounts for significant brain differences, including forcing the male brain into a more compartmentalized or specialized thinking style as opposed to the more holistic and generalized thinking patterns of women (Campbell, 1980; Moir & Jessel, 1991; Pool, 1994; Springer & Deutsch, 1981; Tanenbaum, 1989).

Neurological studies indicate that girls and boys brains are different from birth, mature at different rates during childhood, and use different areas of their brains to perform the same activities (Begley, 1995; Gorski, 1991). These and similar findings led to conclusions that women's speech patterns, including using a communication style that reinforces connection and seeks confirmation, is partially a result of brain specialization as well as early language development (Moir & Jessel, 1991; Tanenbaum, 1989). Since communication depends on context (and consists of encoding and decoding messages), and women's brains organize and process language differently from males, women's styles differ in both sending and receiving language (Pearson, Turner & Todd-Mancillas, 1991).

The "nurture" discussions concentrate on the fact that women are

socialized in the American culture to focus their attention on the nurturing, care, and needs of others, in particular the dominant group (Keen, 1991; Miller, 1986a; Noddings, 1984). The subordinate members of a culture are encouraged to adopt a language style that listens to others, encourages others to express themselves freely, chooses not to interrupt others, and often tries to avoid conflict that threatens desired connections. Thus women's communication style tends to be socialized towards seeking confirmation, enhancing relationships, and building intimacy (Campbell, 1980; Glass, 1992; Tannen, 1990).

Voice

Voice is defined by Brown and Gilligan (1992) as "the capacity to reveal the inside world of thoughts and feelings" (p.173). Voice is the ability to think, speak and act with balance between inner thoughts and the strength that comes from personal experiences. Belenky et al (1986) referred to the expression of voice as the unifying of mind, voice and self, and wrote that the quest for voice and self is critical for women's growth. This is considered to be a difficult accomplishment in our current society. Brown and Gilligan (1992) wrote that, "Women's psychological development within patriarchal societies and male-voiced cultures is inherently traumatic" (p. 216). Because of women's subordinate position in our current culture, women often choose a position of silence rather than run the risk of a conflict that may result in a break in a relationship or even physical violence. Thus they choose not to--or are unable to--achieve the authentic voice within a relationship in which both parties are free to voice thoughts, feelings, and ideas in a mutual format.

When women communicate the various experiences of their lives with understanding and conviction, integrating inner, intuitive knowledge with outer experiences, and are able to do so without fear of potential consequences, they are said to have an authentic voice. As Belenky et al. (1986) wrote, "To learn to speak in a unique and authentic voice, women must 'jump outside' the frames and systems authorities provide and create their own framework" (p. 134).

The term "voice" began to appear in the feminist literature in the early 1970s as a contrast between a woman's private voice (i.e., within the home) and a man's public or professional voice. The interpretation was that male voices were the culturally accepted norm, and women often felt silenced, ignored, unheard or unheeded, or verbally attacked when trying to voice an opinion outside their assigned domain. Women referred to themselves as being voiceless, meaning feeling isolated and restricted in social development and experience. Having a voice of one's own is usually interpreted as the woman having a sense of positive self-worth, a connection to others, an ability to intertwine voice, mind and self, and the strength to escape cultural restrictions to create one's own frame of reference in both private and public situations (Belenky et al., 1986; Bolen, 1994; Gilligan, 1982b; Goodman, 1992; Helgeson, 1990; Jordan et al, 1991; Mann, 1994; McIntosh, 1995; Miller, 1986b; Tannen, 1994). Recognition of this growth in learning has inspired more studies in feminist, psychological and sociological research, and offers depth and wider recognition to the experiences of women.

Many women had a solid and integrated voice during their childhoods up

to the age of about 11 or 12, then, due mostly to cultural pressures to conform to feminine models, allowed their voices, which represented confidence in their own opinions, values, and knowledge, to become hesitant or even silent. An adolescent girl often replies to questions (that she readily knows answers to) with a shy "I don't know" rather than risk ridicule or criticism (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Hancock, 1989). During the early adolescent years many of these young women lost their confidence and assurance, looked to others for confirmation, and often became afraid to speak up for fear of upsetting others or as appearing to be bossy or pushy (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Hancock, 1989; O'Reilly, 1994). These young girls learned to hide under the social constraints of what is considered to be acceptable behavior for women in this society, which is subordination to the male position and the adoption of a more tentative, less assertive style of communication as well as a loss of a sense of self. Some researchers feel that young girls continue to hide their voices until reaching their midlife years, when they finally feel it is acceptable to become one's own person, to recognize and accept individual female talents and to integrate the personal voices of reason, expertise and intuition (Estes, 1992; Greer, 1991; Jong, 1994).

This lengthy stage of silent voice, roughly from menarche to menopause, and the tendency for this voice to burst out in the middle years, has been well chronicled in recent years (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Greer, 1991; Hancock, 1989; Jong, 1994; Jordan et al., 1991; O'Reilly, 1994; Sheehy, 1993; Sheehy, 1995). Women who are currently in the middle years are finding the courage and understanding to begin to reclaim their integrated selves and share their lifetime

of knowledge with others, thus balancing their own needs with the needs of others. It is this voice of connectedness that offers commonalities of experience with others and the acquisition of personal power that often translates into a sense of personal accomplishment and control over one's life. Sheehy (1993) referred to this connectedness as a "massive psychic shift [that] involves a transition from survival to mastery--where we are capable of acting on the world rather than merely reacting to others" (p. 309).

The fiftieth birthday has often been described as a critical time when women begin to reassess their priorities and find their voices, beginning to express themselves in an authentic manner. Rountree (1993) spoke of this age as a pivotal time, a time when many women reach out beyond their families to share their experiences and gifts. It must be cautioned, however, that a single birthday cannot encompass the phenomenon of midlife changes, and there is a wide age span when this finding of voices occurs, depending on the individual woman, her experiences, and her choices. Midlife--whenever a woman feels it to be--is a time when women from all segments of our culture tend to express their emerging identity. They report a focusing of energy, the courage to express a personal voice, an ability to concentrate on what they feel is important, an unwillingness to let family or society dictate what they should do, and being free to do (for the first time) what they like, in their own time and on their own terms (Rountree, 1993). Finding one's voice means something different to each woman, but it is clear that the midlife age is an important milestone for many women.

Midlife seems to be the time when many women finally achieve the balance between being skeptical about their abilities (from a lifetime of subordinate or negative experience) to learning to trust their own knowledge and instincts. Perhaps it is the release from our youth-oriented societal expectations of "beauty and duty," as Keen (1991) wrote about; perhaps it is a stage of development when women fully realize their ability to speak and naturally integrate two languages, that of male and female. This talent for speaking two languages and understanding of the many varieties and uses of voice seems to be more fully recognized when a woman reaches an age, usually midlife, when she can catch her breath and reflect back on her experiences (Rountree, 1993). This time seems most readily expressed during the middle years of a woman's life when she reacts--often strongly--to a past of self-sacrifice and a lifetime of setting aside her own time and interests, and discovers a yearning to find a new and socially accepted outlet for energies (Bateson, 1990). Estes (1992) stressed this is the time to reclaim one's connection to what is natural and individual and personal, to explore one's powerful and creative subconscious forces that revive intuition, mystical powers, and the discovery of a timeless knowledge. Only when a woman regains the ability to speak honestly about her own self and her own needs can she regain a personal sense of strength and a feeling of self-worth (Estes, 1992).

The passage to become one's own person is not an easy one, however; a lifetime of cultural conditioning that restricts women's roles and places little value on women's interests, goals and connections has taken its toll on the female

psyche (Estes, 1992). Women's communication styles, the tendency towards being silent in mixed gender groups and speaking in a manner that is culturally labeled as nonauthoritative or questioning, have contributed to a deeply ingrained sense of their powerlessness, often leading women to doubt their contributions (Belenky et al., 1990; McIntosh, 1995; Tannen, 1993).

The literature of the 1990s reflects the acceptance that women no longer have to force a personal change by adopting a male speech style in order to be successful in the work environment (Astin & Leland, 1992; Helgeson, 1990, Tannen, 1994). Most of the American working world is aware that there will continue to be two genders at home and in the work place, and that each gender brings unique and positive talents to each environment. Women are beginning to recognize that they no longer need to change their style of communication, language, or voice in an attempt to match the male or authoritarian style, but can now accept their own voice, their own authenticity, and their own natural communication style, which reinforces positive self identity and often creates successful results of cooperation and collaboration in the workplace.

Conclusion

An overall view of this literature offers an interesting pattern in which there are increasing numbers of female writers strongly supporting women's issues, and male writers who occasionally include women's development or styles in their writings but whose focus is primarily on males. One notable exception is from a particularly outspoken male anthropologist, Ashley Montague (1952/1953/1968/1974/1992), who entitled his book, *The Natural Superiority of*

Women. Each republished version inspired an avalanche of reviews (p. 160). Fully believing in female natural biological superiority, he tackles issues of subordination, emotionality, intelligence, creativity, and changing traditions of women (1992). Most of the literature of the late 1980s and 1990s mentioned in this study, however, focused either on strengths or personalities of one gender, or raised dichotomous issues that tend to separate the genders into irreconcilable camps. It seems clear that interpretations are often made (with only a few exceptions) based on personal gender experiences and an interest in research of one's own gender traits, with little current emphasis placed on unifying themes or combining the unique talents of each gender.

Both men and women's roles have changed in the last thirty years, but many researchers feel women's roles have changed the most dramatically. However, despite legal mandates and inclusion of women in many occupational groups, many cultural boundaries are slow to reflect these changes. Our society remains a patriarchy, and, in spite of the increased opportunities for women, there are many hurdles in a woman's professional path. Women still face the deeply entrenched concepts of male-dominated customs and closed corporate doors, but many midlife women continue to stretch the boundaries with courage and a willingness to re-define who they are, what talents they possess, and how they can best continue to encourage their own growth as well as the growth of others. Their voices of identity and authenticity, and their strong and supportive communication styles, can increasingly be heard in all segments of our society.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of the personal journeys these midlife tomboy women have taken up to this point in their lives. These experiences, organized around the specific life events of being a tomboy, entering adolescence, experiencing midlife, and making career choices, were analyzed with the purpose of seeing "how respondents make sense of events and actions in their lives" (Reissman, 1993, p. 2). This methodology involved a narrative reflective process which assists in the description and interpretation of personal experiences as each woman describes midlife and believes she is breaking through traditional cultural boundaries in order to create--or regain--her own sense of authenticity and voice. According to Denzin (1989), "A personal experience story is a narrative that relates the . . . teller to a significant set of personal experiences that have already occurred" (p. 38). Narrative is a traditional method of teaching cultural traditions and expectations that helps with understanding and memory, and aids interpretations of our world (Polkinghorne, 1988; Reissman, 1993).

Reissman (1993) wrote, "Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives" (p. 2). We are curious about different life choices, and have a long history of using stories for teaching.

"To do research is always to question the way we experience our world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (van Manen, 1990, p.5).

I used personal interviews for gathering life story information. The narrative approach offered the opportunity to explore a wide range of stories about individual experiences and the complexities of human lives. Narratives are considered quite effective in the examination of one's life and interactions with the world (Husserl, 1970). Linde (1993) wrote, "Narrative is among the most important social resources for creating and maintaining personal identity. . . .for creating our internal, private sense of self and. . . .for conveying that self to and negotiating that self with others" (p. 98). Narratives also tend to offer explanations of the cultural conditions that persist in shaping lives (Denzin, 1989). My goal was to obtain a subjective and interpretive understanding of the individual social and professional experiences of each woman in an attempt to more fully understand the influences that encouraged (or discouraged) the development of each woman's individual tomboy identity and voice.

Research Design

The design of this project centered on the subjective interview process as the researcher probed for the meanings that these participants have found within their everyday world as tomboys. The interviewer and interviewee acted as co-explorers to examine the fullness of the experiences these women have had (Tesch, 1984). As recommended by Denzin (1989) and Reinharz (1992), the interviews followed a conversational format with open-ended questions. The questions were structured from four general questions, and remained flexible in

that the probing of each question, and the order that the questions were responded to, were tailored to fit each participant. This research remained open-ended to encourage the deepest meanings to emerge. As van Manen (1990) stated, "This is a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would govern the research project" (p. 29).

Thus the personal narrative framework was appropriate for exploring what it means to be a midlife tomboy developing her voice and discussing which boundaries--if any--she believes she has challenged. The narrative format is consistent with the feminist research perspective in which the research explores questions of interest to women; both interviewer and participants are women; the interviewer's voice is included (I am also a midlife, heterosexual tomboy), a non-hierarchical, partnership relationship is established between interviewer and participant(s), an environment of trust is considered vital to the interview process; both descriptive and interpretive methodology is included to understand participant's significant feelings and values, and the goal is to publish the lived experiences of women in the scholarly, as well as popular, literature (Harding, 1991; Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Reinharz, 1992; Reissman, 1993).

I consider myself a partnership feminist, embracing Eisler's (1990) Partnership Model as our only hope for advancement and survival. In Eisler's (1987) theory of Cultural Transformation, both the traditional male scientific view and the feminist views "share the growing awareness that the present system is

breaking down, that we must find ways to break through to a different kind of future" (p. xxii). According to Eisler, "the original partnership direction of Western culture veered off into a bloody five-thousand-year dominator detour" (p. xxii). The Dominator Model, with language and actions focusing on war, violence, power, control, and suppression, has created enormous pain and brought our world to the brink of extinction. We have reached a cultural crossroads; our choices are critical.

My feminist voice resonates with the basic tenets of Eisler's Partnership Model which values respect for nature, striving for interdependency, open communication, mutual empathy, supportive gender partnerships, and honoring all individuals. I have long felt this was the only healthy path to walk, and have focused my professional career, including this research, toward helping both genders build successful personal and professional relationships.

As a partnership feminist I believe women's voices can help shape a new, collaborative language and new way of life consonant with partnership ideals. Although it would seem that many midlife women appear eager to work toward and live within a partnership culture, I decided to narrow my research focus to midlife tomboys. It was my intuitive sense, reinforced by informal conversations with other midlife tomboys, that tomboys seemed to have a basic understanding of both the dominator and partnership languages, and felt strongly about working towards partnership relationships. Since little is known of the lives of midlife tomboys, the narrative method from a feminist perspective was the most fitting way for me to explore their stories.

Participant Selection

Selection of participants involved a convenience sampling of ten women who considered themselves to be in the midlife age range (this definition differed for each woman) and currently employed in a paid professional and publicly visible position. These women also considered themselves to have been tomboys during their late childhood and/or early adolescent ages. Although "tomboy" is defined by *The American Dictionary of the English Language* (1980) as a "young girl who acts like a spirited boy," I allowed each participant to self-define this term; if the woman said she was, or felt that she still is a tomboy, that was an acceptable definition. The only questions I asked for selection purposes were, "Do you consider yourself to be in midlife?" and "Do you consider yourself to have been, or still be, a tomboy?" If both answers were yes, I asked the final question, "Are you currently employed in some aspect of professional work?"

Participants were selected by speaking with potential interviewees recommended by other women who knew of this study, and with tomboys who had called me with an expressed interest in becoming a part of this research. I telephoned each woman and explained the nature of this research, that I was looking for expressive use of language and depth of story as we explored the experiences she has had on her journey from adolescent tomboy to midlife woman. When she agreed to participate, we arranged a mutually convenient meeting time for the first interview. I made a follow-up telephone call to confirm our interview (and to ask for directions), then mailed, if there was sufficient time, the four primary questions for each participant to think about prior to the

interview. This purposeful sampling process continued until I had a list of eight women willing to participate in this study. Ten additional women asked to be included in this research. I included the first two who asked me, for a total number of ten participants (Appendix A). I agreed to stay in touch with the others in the event this study is enlarged later.

The consent form (Appendix B) was signed at the first interview. I interviewed two women from the San Francisco area, one woman living in San Diego who recently returned to Canada, and seven women currently living in San Diego. I had additional phone calls and casual meetings with several of the women at their request.

Data Collection

I conducted the first of two planned interviews, each lasting approximately one hour for each participant. Each interview took place in the location of the participant's choice, with my only request to have a quiet, private place where we were not disturbed for the duration of the interview. Interviews took place in private offices, homes, and one quiet corner of a deserted university coffee shop.

The initial interview was used to develop a conversational relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, keeping in mind that the goal was to let the four original research questions (Appendix C) lead the interview (van Manen, 1990). I had a list of probes or additional questions available, and used them when necessary, which was seldom. Also, each participant was encouraged to make notes or include additional stories, journal entries, or other material she felt was relevant, which I assured her would be included at any time before the final

document was completed.

I recorded each interview by audio tape, and made personal field notes at the conclusion of our time together. The field notes consisted of my observations, descriptions of participant and environment, impressions of individual body language and personality style, and my intuitive responses to the interview. The initial interviews were followed by the transcription of the taped interview. I then reviewed the transcriptions collected from each participant, and searched for common themes, experiences, or expressions of voice.

The original plan was to ask each participant, for the second and final interview, to create or choose a symbolic art piece, drawing, photograph, object, or anything of her choice, that reflected how she felt about having lived her life as a tomboy. Our second interview was to be a discussion of the tomboy's interpretation and explanation of her creative piece. In the first several interviews, however, the participants requested that they be able to write out their reflections in their own time and of their own length, wishing to have time to reflect on, change, or include more details than they can think of at the time of an interview. I then wrote a letter to all participants to solicit their opinions of the proposed change (Appendix D). Since there were no objections, the change in format was confirmed.

We then set a mutually agreed-upon deadline of approximately one month for all participants to complete the creative art piece and their written description and mail it to me, with the agreed understanding that I would reimburse them for all mailing expenses and return their art piece and written text within two weeks.

I agreed to this change in format because I felt it was important to respect the enthusiasm and creative desires of the participants, and because I wanted to encourage and assist each midlife tomboy in constructing her own format for interpreting the meanings she attaches to her tomboy experiences. Many women are more comfortable having time to sort through emotions and feelings of certain experiences in order to clarify their responses (Belenky, et al. 1986). This time allowed them to step back from what may have been an emotional framework and offered reflective time to define their knowledge in a more descriptive manner (Fonow & Cook, 1991). The creative art piece and written text encouraged this reflective and creative descriptive time.

Data Analysis

The data from these interviews was first coded by searching for themes or "structures of experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). Reissman (1993) recommended studying the narrative structure to establish the organization and why the story was developed for this particular conversation, and suggested beginning an analysis from inside the structure--meanings of words, language usage--then expanding the analysis to include concepts understood by both participant and interviewer, including social and cultural influences. Labov (1972) recommends a narrative structural analysis including a summary, progression of events and their meaning to the individual, and the results of these events. The Personal Narratives Group (Eds) (1989) followed a structure in which the context of a narrative is written in such a way to "weave together, to twine, to connect. . . .[which] creates webs of meaning within which humans act"

(p. 19). In addition, the Personal Narratives Group wrote, "Gender may be an important determinant of the organizing features of life experience" (p. 100) and that women's narratives contribute diverse and solid sources for an increase in feminist knowledge. "Narrativation tells not only about past actions but how individuals understand those actions, that is, meaning" (Reissman, 1993, p. 19).

These methods of analysis necessitated repeated listenings, careful examination of the language in transcribed materials, and notation within the documents of emotional responses, pauses, changes in pitch and/or volume, and laughter. These responses were included in the analysis.

My goal in writing the analysis of data was to create separate verbal portraits of each woman to help understand the individual influences and decisions made, then weave together the major themes in an effort to create a mosaic of their common experiences. With this goal in mind, I chose to adopt the analysis method recommend by the Personal Narratives Group (Eds.) from their book, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*. After much discussion and experimentation they selected and wrote about a chosen format that first establishes the Context of the data, then divides the information in three main themes: Frameworks of Meaning, Relationships, and Historical and/or Memorable Moments. The data from the ten midlife tomboys fit into this structure well and offered a total of four subthemes under each primary theme that allowed for an in depth analysis and understanding.

Thus I analyzed for clarity, coded first by colored pen then by color-coded stickers, each of the three primary themes, then re-analyzed the data to code

each of the 12 subthemes for all ten tomboy women. Additional markings had been made within the transcripts to note voice and pitch changes, repetitions, pauses, and laughter. (There were mostly dark blue stickers marking laughter.)

The next step was to separate the individual quotes and stories that fit into each subtheme, which I then printed out on different colored sheets of paper to identify each subtheme and its 4-7 pages of individual quotes. These also were tagged with color-coded stickers. A final analysis was then made by identifying key words within each subtheme (such as discussions of traits of independence and strength, emotional issues such as confidence, honesty, and examples of how each tomboy resolved challenges and faced life stages) before I could begin to weave together the common themes in order to present a coherent picture of the tomboy narratives. Each theme is introduced by a quote from the participant for whom the theme held special meaning or a powerful memory.

This narrative analysis lends itself well to a study using storytelling as a primary means of communication, and was particularly useful for the stories of these ten midlife tomboys. Storytelling is well known as a powerful and historical force for narrating personal experiences and cultural traditions, with the ability to connect past and present and give texture to the purpose and directions of our journeys. The participants in this study were able to provide both cultural and personal experiences for this study, and frequently contacted me with additional insights and thoughts after the interviews were concluded.

Everyone has a story to tell. My challenge was to collaborate closely with each woman to give her the opportunity to share her story as a path to discovery

and recognition of her identity, and to find the central theme running through each story. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) wrote, my role as a researcher was "to document the ways [the story] is expressed, to try to understand its origins and meanings, to interpret its symbols and metaphors, to find ways of displaying it" (p. 613). As I created individual portraits, then searched for the common colors and themes that help us all make sense of our lives, my goal was to reinterpret and understand each individual experience.

Protection of Human Subjects

There were virtually no potential risks to the participants in this study, and except for possible minor fatigue, the benefits definitely outweighed any perceived risks. I adhered strictly to the University of San Diego's Protection of Human Subjects Guidelines. The population (midlife women), the facilities where the interviews were conducted (a quiet, undisturbed location of the participant's choice), and a list of sample questions all suggested that the potential risks to the participant would be minimal.

An approved consent form, discussing the nature of this study, the time involved, and the nature of the questions was signed by all participants. My name, address and phone number was included and the participants knew they could withdraw at any time without risk or penalty (Appendix A). There were no expenses to the participants.

If any names appeared on the tapes, other than those used by the participants choosing to use their real names, they were erased. Although the interviews will become part of public record after publication, each woman had

the choice of keeping her identity confidential, selecting a pseudonym to protect her privacy, or having her name included in the text.

Limitations

The first limitation to this study was that the researcher's format of requiring interviewing of a particular life experience dictated that the participants not be chosen at random but were a convenience sample. This small sample may restrict or prevent any broader social or developmental implications from being generalized to all midlife women, but the purpose of this narrative study is to develop a possible interpretation of a particular human experience, not to transfer these results to another population or to develop a general theory about women of this or any other population.

A second limitation is that the time restrictions were established in order to not abuse the privilege of interviewing women who are involved in their work and may be unable to spend unlimited time discussing their tomboy experiences. I believe the verbal interview process and the creative piece accompanied by the written response enabled me to discern many common themes and offered potential directions for further study.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTENT ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The analysis of data from the Voices of Midlife Tomboys research followed the basic format presented in the book, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, edited by the Personal Narratives Group at the University of Indiana (1989). I found this method particularly useful because of the focus on feminist research, with the basic premises of listening to the stories and salient features of other women's experiences and examining the social context and cultural differences between men and women. The Personal Narratives Group believes that many women's stories are actually counter-narratives, because they reveal that the narrators do not think, feel, or act as they are 'supposed to'. . . .many women's personal narratives unfold within the framework of an apparent acceptance of social norms and expectations but nevertheless describe strategies and activities that challenge those norms. (p. 7)

The narratives of these particular tomboy participants can be described as counter-narratives.

This chapter begins with preliminary findings, then is divided into four main sections, each of which includes a discussion to deepen our understanding of these tomboy lives and the findings captured along the way. The first section

introduces each of the ten midlife tomboys, with their chosen names and a description of demographic information. Five of them chose to use a pseudonym and the other five chose to use their own names; the reasons for these choices are explained as these are the names that will be used throughout the remainder of this chapter.

The second section of the chapter offers the major themes in a format suggested by The Personal Narratives Group (1989), beginning with an introduction of the Historical Context, followed by Frameworks of Meaning, Relationships, and Memorable Moments of Life Stages. Each of these three major themes has four subthemes, resulting in a total of 12 subthemes, which form the analytic structure of the narratives. These are as follows: the Frameworks of Meaning includes subthemes of the definition of tomboy, the physical and competitive attitudes, how they view themselves, and how they have stretched societal norms. The second major theme, Relationships, encompasses discussions of the family of origin, associations with peers, influences on career choices, and efforts to achieve balance between independent and interdependent attitudes by "walking with one foot in each world." The third theme is Memorable Moments of Life Stages, and includes the four life stages of preadolescence, adolescence, young adulthood and midlife.

I have chosen to tell these stories by incorporating all participants whose stories are so filled with vivid descriptions, emotional insights and self discoveries that each voice deserves to be heard within each subtheme. Each subtheme is introduced by a quote from one of the tomboys for whom the theme resonated

most strongly, followed by the other participant comments. Thus each voice will be heard in every subtheme, weaving the texture of their combined tomboy experiences.

The third section is a summary of these midlife tomboys including their strengths, challenges, outlooks for the future, and their unanimous belief that being a tomboy has been a unique and special way to negotiate being a woman in a patriarchal society.

There were several preliminary findings that I discovered early in this project. The first was a high level of spontaneous enthusiasm. Every tomboy participant was outwardly enthusiastic and eager to take part in this study. They mentioned it to friends, who called me asking to be included in this research. I easily could have tripled the number of participants if I had desired; instead I made the decision to widen this research to tomboys of all ages when this project is completed. This unexpected enthusiastic response and deep desire to share their stories clearly was not anticipated.

Also, each participant demonstrated a strong curiosity about the stories that emerged from this study, asking me what experiences the participants had shared. The conversation quickly inspired them to share, unasked, at least 15 minutes of their own tomboy experiences. They often concluded this outburst by wondering aloud about their daughters, asking if my findings might help their tomboy daughters negotiate future hurdles. This curiosity sparked interesting conversations, in both academic and social settings. It soon became obvious to me that women--of all ages--were eager to talk about their tomboy experiences.

Along with the above curiosity was the mention of perceived neglect from many of the younger women I spoke to, from teenagers to young women in their 20s to 30s. "Why aren't you studying *our* age group?" was the common question. The only answer that seemed to satisfy them was that I promised I would study all age groups next, and again I was admonished to include them when I expanded the study. None of these findings was anticipated, but they gave positive impetus to the work.

A final finding is that if a woman is not a tomboy, she seems to have no interest in this research about tomboys. When learning of my topic, non-tomboy women often looked blank, then changed the subject. Most males also showed a lack of interest. These predominantly negative reactions confirmed one of my biases that one of the reasons these tomboys have been so eager to speak about their experiences to me is because they have not been able, for most of their lives, to find a nontomboy audience interested enough with whom they can share their thoughts. As one tomboy participant said, "I've waited 30 years to talk about this!"

Ten Tomboy Participants

The first tomboy in this study is a 44 year old woman who recently completed a doctorate of education and is currently employed as a school superintendent. She chose the temporary name "Peppermint Patti," which she kept for two months before writing me with a special request to change her pseudonym to "Fury" from a childhood book because, as she said, she "always identified with the horse, not the man or woman!" She is a slender, quick-

moving, and deep thinking individual who laughs easily and often, has free-flowing, medium length curly gray hair, and appears to be as comfortable with her words and thoughts as she is with her individual style of dress. She kicked off her shoes, put her feet up on the coffee table, and appeared as comfortable and chatty as if she was sitting in her own home. She has been divorced for several years, no children, and is challenged by her current job. Nonconformity is a point of pride with her, from her clothing to hair style to patterns of living. Her enthusiasm during the interview and later discussions was boundless and contagious, and she often called or wrote with added thoughts and insights.

The second tomboy chose the name of Michael, because "I just have always loved the name Michael!" A 42 year old married nurse, Michael is tall, walks with assurance, and prefers practical clothes and a short, easy-to-care for hairstyle. She is currently enrolled in a doctoral program in nursing, and seems curious about many different areas of her life. She has spent a great deal of time in recent years examining personal choices--such as not to have children, working steadily since college, challenging relationships with her peers--and the influences of her family and extended family. Michael gives the appearance of a strong, independent thinker who remains open to new ideas and is constantly redefining her interests and goals. She was eager to conduct the interview, and produced a deep and probing self-reflection piece to go with her beautiful creative art piece. Her interest in this study remains high and has called to say, "I can't wait to hear what your study has discovered."

Annie Oakley, the third tomboy, loves horses, denim, and anything to do

with Native American spirituality. Her hair is short and curly because "I don't have the patience to fuss with it." She is a former speech pathologist, ran several small business ventures while raising, with her husband of 33 years, a daughter and a son, and currently is a college instructor and consultant to business and women's groups. Although her grown daughter participated in all the physical activities known to tomboys, and fits all subthemes described in this study, she does not consider herself to be a tomboy, and they've often discussed this difference. Annie's relationships with her husband and extended family have undergone many challenges and have encouraged her to reach out to women in particular. Annie considers her current age of 56 to be only the beginning of midlife and would like to add travel to her busy agenda. Her love of the outdoors, family, comfortable clothes, and physical exercise has been a part of her personality "for my entire life. I'm not about to change now."

Tomboy #4 originally named herself Twanda from the character in the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes*. Twanda was always "doing something different, not being what was expected of a female." A month after the interviews, after thinking about it "almost nonstop," she requested a change of pseudonym, choosing Sinclair, which was her mother's maiden name and had "always been a favorite name--one I thought I'd go back to for my last name someday." Sinclair arrived at the interview promptly, dressed in shorts and a tee shirt, her short brown hair curly and natural. She is a 49 year old college graduate and accountant. Sinclair tended to speak in quick bursts, words spilling over each other, running together in a delightful soft Southern accent. She showed no

hesitation in her discussions, and seemed to feel her tomboyiness was such an accepted part of her being that she was almost surprised at my interest in this topic. Sinclair has a solid understanding of the lives and interests of her two daughters (one of whom is a tomboy) and their life choices, is once widowed and once divorced, and says she is very comfortable with her current life except "I'd like to find a job so I could be outside more."

Sydney is the pseudonym for the fifth tomboy interviewed, a 52 year old computer programmer, wife, and the mother of two grown boys. She has tremendous enthusiasm for this project, has asked many questions before, during, and since the interview process, and often expresses an interest in getting another degree "if I could just decide what I wanted to get it in!" Her love of study and learning is evidenced in her interview and in additional phone calls and coffee meetings. Sydney walked into the interview at the appointed time, dressed as many other tomboys did, in jeans and a blazer, also wearing her hair short and curly. Sydney was the only participant, however, who had spent hours pouring over the four questions, writing answers to them in the allotted space, then adding other thoughts in the margins. When the interview was completed she checked her pages to make sure everything had been included. Sydney is on a search, she said often, for a new career or type of work that challenges her endless curiosity about women and uses her considerable organizational talents. Participating in this project, she said, has encouraged her to look for something as creative and stimulating as research with other midlife women.

Sarah is a relaxed, straight-talking, no-nonsense 56 year old tomboy with

distinctive casual dress, shoulder-length brown and slightly graying hair, and a delightful dry sense of humor that pops up during quiet moments. She began her career as a grade school teacher, then spent "quite a few years" as a full time mother of a son and daughter (her daughter is definitely a tomboy, she claims) before returning to volunteer in a gift shop then work as the coordinator of a custom Christmas decorations business. The interview with Sarah was the most relaxed and humorous of them all, perhaps because she was the one participant I had known for many years, yet only saw occasionally. We thought it may have been our long friendship that made the interview so relaxed and informative, with an "anything goes" style of talking about any facet of tomboys that came to mind. Sarah's ideas, words, and humor painted a picture of a woman who has thought deeply about family issues (as have the other participants) and radiated a calm confidence in knowing who she is and why she does things. She has travelled extensively (with her husband of 33 years and other adventurous friends) on long bicycle trips through Europe and the United States, and has faced life-threatening challenges in her own family which she feels she survived emotionally by having her tomboy strengths. Sarah also treasures her physical stamina and flexibility, both of which she also attributes to being a tomboy.

Elizabeth, also 56, was the most free-spirited, free-wheeling midlife woman in this study. She taught grade school for a short time, raised three children, and has spent many years exploring alternative interests of various art forms, jewelry making, spirituality, and women's issues. Through a divorce and recent remarriage Elizabeth has continued to devote time to interests that "keep

me grounded," and wears a necklace that signifies staying in touch with the Earth's forces. Her blue jeans were an expected sight, as were her turtleneck shirt and sweater. But her gorgeous smooth, silver, shoulder-length hair was a stunning sight, and is, as she said, her pride and joy. She has been told she is an inspiration to many of her midlife friends to "stay natural." She toyed with words and expressions during the interview, adding different shades of meanings, almost like an artist searching for the right color to make her statement clear. Elizabeth had decided what her creative art piece and description were going to be, but warned me that she often goes into a quiet time, almost a hibernation, during a creative period. By the time this writing was concluded I had not received either the art piece or the writing, to my regret.

My eighth participant was an energetic 48 year old Anthropology and Women's Studies professor at a prestigious Northern California University. Her enthusiasm for this tomboy topic soared as high as the Andes mountains she loves to climb on her summer wilderness treks. Lynn, her real name, told me prior to the interview that in Spanish the word for tomboy is "Marimacha" from the female name Mari and the feminine version of "macho." This initiated a spirited discussion of our word combining two male names, the Spanish being more accurate by combining female and male words.

Lynn was extremely easy to talk with, had an energetic and scholarly approach to many subjects, and made a point to keep me a participant in the conversation. Her anthropology work demands she interview, photograph, "and peer into other people's lives, their children, clothes, and rituals." Since she

believes her work is "often quite intrusive," she makes a point of helping others in return. Thus I had a most eager participant! Lynn, a widow with grown children, was dressed "as I always dress" in denim skirt and shirt and carried a large handmade Peruvian purse. She was constantly moving, gesturing, exclaiming, leaning forward to make a point, her short, natural hair often bobbing in rhythm with her words. Lynn wondered if all of my participants were slender, and when I replied yes, she postulated that this might be a finding, that tomboys' love of physical exercise and comfort with their bodies may be a particular tomboy trait. She hugged me at the end of the interview, and thanked me for giving her the opportunity to talk about "such a special part of my life." She announced that her creative piece would be a photograph from one of her adventures, combining her love of photography with a description of how she feels about being a tomboy in her life today.

Sue, the ninth participant, also chose to use her real name. We met in her office where she is a Certified Financial Analyst with her own investment company. Sue was direct, laughed easily, and spoke as much about her children (one of whom is definitely a tomboy, according to Sue) as she did about herself. She had a unique way of intertwining her story with that of her 12 and 14 year old daughters, as if the three of them are learning from each other in their living adventures. Sue had thought about the questions and had decided that for her the competitive aspect of being a tomboy was her most treasured aspect. She gave clear examples, tying in references from readings, personal experiences, her family of origin, and the challenges of her second marriage and

current blended family. Her shoulder-length blonde hair and flowered print dress reminded me of California casual, but she remained businesslike and efficient, watching the clock and making sure she was covering the topics. Her humor is expressed in short, quick bursts before she returned to the discussion. At the end of the interview she scheduled the second one, and advised me that a creative art piece would be difficult because of the time of year in her business. I did not receive one, and honored her other commitments.

My tenth and final participant, Jan, referred to hereafter as JB, earned a Ph.D. in psychology financed by high fashion modeling and dancing at the Tropicana in Las Vegas. These pursuits paid for both her undergraduate and graduate education and launched her professional career in Southern California. She arrived at the interview in workout clothes, fresh from a yoga session with her husband, and eagerly began talking and exploring even before the tape recorder was on. JB is the participant who had "waited 30 years to talk about this!" and was clearly ready to dive into the topic. JB laughed easily and often, displaying a clear ability to laugh at herself as well as funny situations. She also takes pride in creating humorous moments to get people "lighten up." During the interview she easily probed deeply into experiences that had been difficult or demeaning, and obviously thought a great deal about influences in her life and deliberate choices she had made. She believed her life as a beautiful woman on the outside and a tomboy on the inside had offered particularly interesting challenges and opportunities, and she articulated them clearly with her soft-spoken, insightful comments.

Frameworks of Meaning

The first major theme, Frameworks of Meaning, incorporates the different ways in which these women made sense of their tomboy lives and how they have chosen to orient themselves in a changing landscape. Each of the four subthemes will be introduced by the one tomboy for whom the topic resonated most deeply, followed by the narratives of the other tomboys.

Defining Tomboy

"The tomboy is the radical, maverick, the rebel, the one
who is willing to honor her soul." (Fury)

Fury reported she had thought a great deal about her definition of tomboy, and although she questioned the origin of the word, she had only praise for the concept of tomboy. She honors her definition of tomboy by adding with pride, "It means being different from other women, it means being different from what boys expect you to be, it means taking risks." Most participants in this study, like Fury, spontaneously questioned the actual word tomboy, yet had no trouble understanding the concept. They were clearly proud of the common meaning of a tomboy being considered to be different, a rebel or a maverick.

Feeling different, from both boys and other girls, was a consistent pattern among the women. Occasionally this was negative, but mostly it was a positive, affirming sense of having attributes others don't have. Michael stated

I'm not sure what being a tomboy does mean. But then again there were real differences between how I acted and what I did and (how) other females acted. I've never been able to deal with the unreal, so I think

that's part of the meaning. . . . When I got into college, I think that was the first time that I finally realized some of what being a tomboy meant. I think being a tomboy meant incorporating male values and looking at the world a little differently than other females did.

Sinclair likened her definition of tomboy to "doing something different, not doing what was expected of a female." Sinclair added that she always was comfortable doing something different, and doesn't remember questioning her actions or ideas.

Sydney opened her discussion with an immediate rebellious comment against the term tomboy, giving full vent to her feelings that the word is negative and demeaning. "I've always wondered why you called them tomboys instead of tomgirls. Because we're talking about girls here, rather than boys."

Annie, on the other hand, like Fury, relished the term tomboy. "Being a tomboy has been a lifelong theme, sometimes noisy, sometimes silent, but always present. I was proud of being different, always liked the name."

Strength, both physical and emotional, was another powerful dimension of the definition of tomboy. "I felt strength," said Fury, "was confident, always felt very good." Fury would have identified with Sarah's insistence, "I'm not a shrinking violet!" Elizabeth phrased her feelings of strength as, "Proud be being strong and able to buck hay and do all the strong things. . . I think tomboy means, right out, the word 'strength'. Physically strong and thinking that the girls who went "Ohhhhhhh" (in a squeaky falsetto voice) I think are pretty silly!"

Lynn felt the term 'tomboy' should be changed to reflect this love of

physical strength, and active girls should be called

adventure Girls, [these are] the girls who are adventurous, who like to do physical things, who don't want to just sit around. And I think it's hard-wired. . . .girls who like to ride bikes, and swim, and camp, and hike, and canoe, and climb trees.

Lynn mentioned that in her studies in anthropology there are always "young mammals who are physically active. We know from our studies of chimpanzees and animals. Play is how young mammals learn." Lynn added that it is unfortunate that "girls who have the same activity level as boys are called tomboys." She felt that the term was negative and encouraged cultural suppression of natural activity levels.

Not only was physical strength considered a real plus, so was emotional strength in the form of confidence and honesty. Michael said in a firm voice, "I had a lot of self confidence that a lot of people didn't have. And I'm pretty honest. I don't put up with bullshit from anybody." Sarah shares the feeling that tomboys have a desire for honesty, "Tomboys are honest, and they don't play games. Another word is wholesome. Also natural, straight forward." Both Sarah and Elizabeth felt that tomboys choose not to participate in the manipulative games that many of the traditionally feminine women learn early, and are proud of their ability to remain confident in their own style and have honest interactions. Elizabeth elaborated that she liked the feeling that she was "opposite from what the prissy girls were" and refused to ever put a bow in her hair or wear frilly clothes. She felt that her refusal to compromise what she felt was right for her

represented being honest in being who she was, and then noted that she had never really thought about it, she just did it.

Sydney also prized her emotional strengths. "It is a really strong sense of just being a person, an individual. And I could do anything I wanted to." Sydney thought for a moment then brought up the value of emotional strength in her role as a mother. She believed that

having children and realizing you're in charge of those children, and they're important to you. . . I felt like I could deal with anything that happened, I could pick up a snake and throw it away if I had to, or the mouse, or strangle the mouse and get it out of the way, deal with hurt animals. I wasn't squeamish. And that came from being strong about it.

Sarah talked about tomboy confidence in her typical no-nonsense manner, starting with a grin and ending with a laugh, "Self confident enough to be your own person and screw you who don't feel the same way!"

This sense of internal and external strength manifested itself in a feeling of independence and nonconformity among these midlife women, a feeling that they have carried with them for most of their lives. "I did a lot of things that were nonconformist, not conforming at all," reported Fury. She then added

and it's doing your own thing. My boyfriend in high school wanted to get married when we were 17. And a lot, most people around did, you know. I left and travelled Europe! . . . Tomboys start [independence] very early, I still feel I can go anywhere and feel that feeling of being odd and be comfortable with it.

Elizabeth likens her emotional strength to "not having to do what everyone else does" and feels she has nourished this strength all her life.

Sue translated the strength to go against traditions by defining tomboys as, "I think that being a tomboy did mean that in your growing up dolls were not on your agenda. Make-up was not part of your agenda. A frilly sort of existence was not part of your growing up." Sue put a different slant on both the physical and emotional strength issues by discussing confidence as a tomboy trait:

I came to understand that being competitive had a lot more to do with being a tomboy than playing with boys and in boys activities. It was a way of thinking, a way of saying you could be competitive with anyone. . .I was very competitive.

Sue feels she is still competitive, which has been a great asset to her business. Sue believes that, "The whole idea of being a tomboy is being competitive and independent and taking responsibility for your own destiny."

The tomboy definitions of who they feel they are as tomboys lends credibility to their insistence that for in many areas of their lives they felt a sense of freedom from the cultural boundaries they saw around them, a feeling that was relished by all ten tomboys. "Being a tomboy meant I was free to be me," said Annie, "I was completely free to be myself, to explore my physical limits in whatever activity I could find. It also meant freedom from artificial rules."

Sydney's description closely matched the others. "Being a tomboy meant I could be a person, without being pegged that I was female or male. And I was allowed to be that."

For these ten tomboys, the actual word tomboy may not have always been considered positive, but the meaning was extremely positive to them. Their concepts of having emotional and physical strength, their maverick streaks that have been cherished and nurtured, and their independent natures are sources of deep pride. JB. summed up the tomboy definitions in her usual thoughtful style, "[Being a tomboy] is an encapsulation of freedom and a burst of energy, all combined, and allowing that energy to carry you wherever you want to go."

Physical Activity and Competition

"Being a tomboy is a way of thinking, a way of saying
you can be competitive with anyone." (Sue)

Sue has lived her entire life with the theme of competition as a constant companion. Her enthusiasm for the concept has carried her to current professional successes and is a theme she reiterates to her two daughters. Sue leaned forward in her chair and spoke slowly and distinctly:

The whole idea of being a tomboy is to compete. My activities were clearly outdoors. I was very competitive, I was competitive for grades and in most of my activities. I was the one who was going to compete and be right up there.

When Sue was twelve she was given a horse, fulfilling a childhood dream since playing with toy horses in the back yard while her younger sisters played indoors with dolls. She often pretended she was in National Velvet or winning the Grand Nationals. The gift of a horse sparked those dreams and nudged her competitive spirit up a notch. "That was some place a girl could be competitive,

primarily women in the field anyway but you could be competitive and not have to back down in competition for anybody, for any reason." Sue laughed about a comment she often heard in the high school halls, "If you're going to go out with Sue, you're taking a back seat to her horse!" Although she was active in student government and had top grades, she spent all her "living, breathing, waking moments with horses."

A change in colleges nourished Sue's competitive spirit when she left a coeducational college after two years, where she felt the environment stressed "looking for a husband". She enrolled in a women's college, which she much preferred:

You could socialize in different environments, you could excel, you could achieve, you could make a statement. It was a smaller student body and a much more competitive environment. It's absolutely true, everything they say, that a women's college environment you are not intimidated by men who tend to dominate classroom discussion.

A willingness and eagerness to be competitive has also been a boost to Sue's professional activities. In her work first with a mutual fund, then as the head of her own investment company, Sue's love of competition and her unwillingness to back down in a challenging situation was the key to her survival and success. This concept was reinforced when attending a recent professional meeting with a woman speaker who explained the dangers of what she called "The Stupid Disease." Sue explained that

the message is true of everybody, but women feel it more so, where so

frequently the talents that you have, talents and abilities, you downplay by saying, 'I was in the right place at the right time, they liked me'. Instead of saying, 'Yea, I'm smart.' or 'Sure, I can do this.' Or 'Yes, I have every capability, just like or better than someone else.' We've been taught so long not to appear too smart. But we should take credit!

The Stupid Disease is certainly not being passed on to Sue's two daughters. "I keep telling them you've gotta get the education to provide for yourself. 'Cause Prince Charming ain't going to do it for you!" Sue started laughing as she added, "What he giveth, he can taketh away!" The competitive spirit is flourishing in her younger daughter just as it did in her mother. "If she doesn't get the grades she [feels she deserves] she is in the teacher's face to find out why, and what can she do to change it for next time." Sue spoke slowly and firmly about her philosophy:

You have to compete to learn. You have to be willing to compete and acknowledge that you are just as smart as, just as articulate as, as brilliant as (now laughing). . . .and not willing to settle for less! The whole idea of being a tomboy is being competitive and independent. And taking responsibility for your own destiny while you're at it.

Elizabeth echoed Sue's experiences with horses, although her competitive streak seems a bit tamer. "If it didn't have anything to do with horses, I wasn't interested in it." Elizabeth would like to have horses again, "I'm still having dreams about having a horse" and hopes to someday have room for them on her property. Her love of athletic activities is undiminished:

I like to ride my bike, be outdoors, being comfortable with all the outdoors things that I still love to do. I'm enjoying the fitness things so I can go backbacking next year. That's my goal. To be able not to have it be the hike from hell.

Elizabeth had an interesting perspective about the high physical activity level she feels tomboys share:

We've always relied on our bodies to do whatever we wanted them to do.

The feminine girls use their bodies as a vehicle to attract boys, and tomboys, we see it as a strength and being able to do anything that we want it to do, and carry us anywhere.

Elizabeth is counting on that strength to carry through for the next several decades. "I'm going to be real pissed off if I get to the point where I can't do all the things that I want to do!"

Annie, like Sue and Elizabeth, also grew up on the back of a horse, and claims a competitive streak that "is always just beneath the surface, ready to jump out." Annie also

had a horse for years, which I loved. Charged all over the fields and got in trouble for galloping down the middle of Main Street. Did it anyway. I climbed trees, made fun of girls who played with dolls, was a terrific shortstop when the boys let me play. In junior high a group of us started our own softball team.

Annie's rebellious streak enabled her to talk her way "out of that dumb Home Ec class. I took a shop class instead. I never saw any reason to hide the fact I was

competitive."

Sinclair never hid her energy or competitiveness either. She spent many childhood years on a farm, so she was comfortable around all animals and often rode horses. Sports were clearly her favorite activity:

I was always outside playing. Mother said if she wanted to know where I was she'd always know I was down at the field playing ball with the boys. I was always outside, never at home. I was always outside doing. [And] I was really better than the boys were!

Sinclair also held fast to her competitive urges when in high school:

I never felt I held myself back intellectually. I was always out there going after the best grades, achieving, in high school. And keeping up with the boys. I never felt like I wanted to hold myself back because I was a girl and not wanting to outshine a boy. I never had that problem. I was out to prove them wrong!

It is clear that Sinclair, like the other tomboys in this study, didn't buy into "The Stupid Disease."

Sydney certainly had no use for that disease, either:

In high school I could see a lot of the girls saying, 'Well, I'd better not be too smart, cause the boys won't like me.' Well, I was the opposite, and I knew what I was doing. I deliberately said I was not going to be that way. And I refused to take Home Ec!

Sydney had clear memories of her childhood and high school experiences and talked about them in a confident manner:

I was a very, very strong person. Very goal-oriented. I had to be the best in class, I always had done my homework, wanted to be able to raise my hand, and I did. I just wanted to know everything and I always wanted to have an answer when I was called on.

Like most other tomboys in this study, Sydney was at the top of her class academically and physically in high school. "And I was a leader. I got into everything there was to get into, and became president of a lot of organizations. I was glad to be smart and capable." Her physical competitive streak found expression on the playing field and on the court. "I was the best basketball player in the class, and the best baseball player. I could out-bat and out-throw most boys around!" These memories always brought a hearty laugh along with the words telling the stories.

JB's competitive juices ran parallel to those of the other tomboys, although she chose slightly different avenues for sports. "I was very involved in fencing, too, which I liked because--ahhhh, I could whip the shit out of anyone! I loved fencing! The playing field was leveled. We had to work on finesse and dexterity and brains." The desire for a level competitive field remained a steady theme for JB. "In early adulthood I found ways I could level the playing field and find out how I could compete. And that was through racing cars, riding motorcycles, climbing mountains, things that involved a lot of dexterity, fast reflexes, balance, finesse."

Sarah was another tomboy who chose different paths, one of the first being a refusal to take the unpopular Home Economics requirement. "In high

school I took shop. Made a cribbage board." Sarah claimed that was far more practical, and fit her personality much better. She was not as successful when she tried out for Little League and Pony League, however, because "at that time you couldn't play. But I've always done athletics, as opposed to shopping."

Sarah draws a fine line in her discussion of competition:

You have to like competition. Winning isn't everything, but I like to do as well as I can. I don't like to let up. I don't call myself a competitive person, but I like competition. I'm competitive with myself. I like to go fast, I like to ski fast, ride my bike fast. And I hate like hell to lose!

Fury had no trouble holding back either. "I was an athlete, loved to run, I loved being outside. I can remember playing tetherball in the 7th grade with the boys. I could EASILY beat the pants off every one of them!" Fury then mentioned her frustrations with the cultural messages that she ought to temper her winning streak to maintain popularity, which she found a ridiculous idea.

Michael also easily remembered her frustration with the athletic limitations imposed on her in high school with the reduced outlet for girls to participate in sports. She had spent time in Japan with her family on one of her father's overseas military assignments, where she was able to participate in girls basketball. "But of course nobody ever came to see it. It was after school, and it was never publicized."

Michael did play on a girls' football team in her high school when her father was transferred back to the states, but rebelled against the name:

The whole idea of 'powderpuff'--I was enraged at the term! It was like,

'Excuuuuuse me!' The Ultra Fems would go over and simper to the boy (coaches) and whine, "'Oh, I don't know how to do it.' It was like, 'Then why are you here?' For me it was serious, let's get on with it! I guess it was just frustrating because it was okay to like sports, you just couldn't participate in them in any meaningful way.

It was not until near the end of high school when she moved to Texas, where tennis was a big sport for girls as well as boys, that she could play on a meaningful girls team. She lettered in tennis, but the same attitude prevailed. "Football was always the big thing. Everybody came out to the games but nobody ever came out to watch tennis. That was the first year they'd ever given a letter for tennis." Michael regrets the imitations imposed on her, but applauds current opportunities for women to participate in almost any sport they choose.

Lynn found ways to participate in almost all sports, gave the credit to both her supportive parents and to the Girl Scout organization, and participated in almost every sport she could, winter and summer. "Tomboys are girls who like to do physical things, who don't just want to sit around. Girls who like to ride bikes, and swim, and camp, and hike, and canoe, and climb trees." Lynn did all those, and more, with a high energy level that was evident from babyhood. "My mother told me I made her black and blue with my jumping around. Even as a baby, jumping up and down, wiggling all over. I gave her black and blue marks on her legs."

High school offered quite a few competitive outlets for Lynn, who was elected Senior Class President. "It was interesting that I did not campaign or run

for it. It came as a total surprise my junior year." She was active in many clubs and activities, including being editor of the school newspaper. (Sydney and Annie share Lynn's history of being school newspaper editors and senior class presidents.)

Competition seemed to come as naturally to Lynn as it did to the other tomboys, and she never succumbed to The Stupid Disease. "Did I dummy down? No. I did not. No! I didn't feel like I had to and my parents did not give me that attitude at all." Lynn's confidence was shaken in college, however, when she was getting the highest grade in her American Intellectual History class and the professor called her into his office then accused her of cheating:

The attitude at that school was that girls who come to this school are mediocre. They said that! Yes, they said that! They told a friend of mine [who is a law school graduate and a practicing attorney now] that she had a typical girl's record, mediocre, don't even consider law school.

The prevailing negative attitude was so strong at this college that Lynn sought a more positive atmosphere when not in classes. "We went right into the counter culture!" By her senior year she felt free to rebel, smoke marijuana, listen to rock bands, and thoroughly enjoyed the atmosphere where males and females were on an equal footing. "It very much upset the administration," she admitted with a wide grin. It was clear that Lynn found her own level playing field, then received a confidence boost "when the GRE's came around and I took them in History, and I did better than any of the guys."

Lynn's lifelong love of physical activity has continued to this day and has

positively impacted her adult choices of being a Field Anthropologist and leader of wilderness treks. She leads treks primarily in Peru, where trekking adventures have been available for only about ten years. Thus women have been able to become about 40% of the trek leaders, where in other parts of the world men lead at least 90% of the wilderness adventures. Being a tomboy, she feels, is almost a prerequisite to leading treks:

Any woman who is timid or scared or even not physically active is going to have a much harder time being an anthropologist. Going off into a foreign culture, and lugging duffel bags, hauling firewood or hauling water, washing clothes outdoors in a laundry tub. It's HARD physical labor.

But the difficulties only spell more challenge to Lynn. "I love the physicality of it. I love spending an entire summer, which sounds crazy to some people, knocking myself out going up and down hills." She added that being slim and in good physical condition was almost a necessity in her job. "You simply cannot be 50 pounds overweight, sedentary, and have these experiences," she said with a shake of her head.

Lynn summed up her feelings about activity and competition with, "I think again that sense of confidence knowing you can run, you could run away from someone, and if you had to, fight with someone, wrestle with someone, comes from being a tomboy."

It was quite clear that there's a distinct ribbon of confidence running through the lives of all ten tomboys.

Identity as a Tomboy

"I just had more guts, more creativity, and took permission
to do what I wanted to do. I figured I'd apologize
for it later if they didn't like it!" (JB)

JB believed she has always had the tools and the desire to get where she wanted to go, and her identity as a tomboy has apparently fueled those ambitions. Besides feeling that she had "more guts, more creativity," a chorus that other tomboys in this study would certainly harmonize with, JB has a unique history of modeling and professional dancing that is not shared by the other nine tomboys. She grew up the only girl in a house with three older brothers, surrounded by a community of Mormons "whose particular theological framework really had to do with women being reproductive people." Since neither the religion nor the reproduction requirement was on JB's agenda, and her education was foremost, she found a creative way to get the financing for college and graduate school. "I put myself through my undergraduate work as a high fashion model for some of the designers." She enjoyed the camaraderie of the women, likening it to finally having sisters, and felt valued as a female for the first time in her life.

Her doctoral degree in psychology was also a creatively financed adventure with a tomboy slant. "When I was dancing [at the Tropicana], in Las Vegas) there was a difference between me and the other people. I was more aggressive, I was earning money not to become a star, it was so I could go to graduate school." JB's penchant for giving herself permission to be herself was

not squelched by stage lights or audiences. "When I was onstage, instead of going through a set of rote movements I would make up entire personalities! I'd be doing the same number, sometimes as an eight year old, sometimes as an 80 year old!" Soon the entire audience was watching her dancing in the back row. "I was just having this great time, doing my own stuff!"

This rebelliousness against traditional female pursuits in the home, and the planning for an exotic female pursuit in a showy format that paid for her education, seemed perfectly natural to JB. She felt the best part of having an innate identity as a tomboy was being comfortable with her natural confidence and being able to express herself assertively. She reported she has always looked at the opportunities available and chosen the best path for herself.

Sinclair resonated with JB in that she did not question the origin of the term tomboy, she simply gave herself permission to do what she wanted to do. She was proud of "breaking out of a female mold. I'm never going to do anything just to be feminine." In fact, she did not seem to even think about it. "I don't remember having a problem with even wanting to be female." She recalls with obvious pride that her uncle used to say, "Damn, you should have been a boy!"

Michael's sense of identity went through a series of up and downs. She did not think her high activity level in childhood was unusual, and did not even hear the term "tomboy" applied to her until high school, which then stirred her rebellious nature. "I thought the whole idea of labeling someone by their mannerisms as a tomboy or being masculine vs. feminine was really stupid." And her feelings have not changed. "It's too bad we have to think that way." She

laughed when remembering some dating experiences in high school in which her best friend, Joe, accompanied her on all her dates for six months. Michael was simply doing what she felt was right, but her dates began to object. "It was really hard for me to say to Joe, 'I'm sorry, you can't come along any more.' I almost quit dating because of it, it was that much of an issue!" Her loyalty to her friends was sorely tested when she began the teenage dating games.

Fury always identified with being a tomboy, but also went through a period when she was uncomfortable with it. Fury revealed that for many years, "I used to be embarrassed by it! I'd hope people didn't know I was one! I always identified with it but tried not to, it was an embarrassing kind of thing, like saying I was too tall." Fury said she was mixed up in those years about who she was. After thinking about it for a few more minutes, Fury decided, "I didn't feel like I had an identity until I read Estes's (1992) [story about the] Ugly Duckling. I LOVED reading it. I felt so validated!"

This confusion about identity did not seem to put a lid on her creativity and independent streak, however. "I always tested others, especially boys. To see if they really wanted (to be with) me. I'd test them to see if I can be less than a beauty and they'd still want me. I still do!" But those old feelings still haunt Fury, "especially when I'm around an ultra-feminine woman. Like last night, we went to a bar in La Jolla--scared me to death!" Fury is laughing as she tells the story, but the undercurrent is clear. "An attack, a total attack of insecurity, especially in California. The ubiquitous perfect body, perfect hair, perfect wealth, and perfect everything is in your face when you go in these places." Fury laughed about how

she first thinks about having to cross her legs properly, play with fingernails, bat her eyelids--but only for a moment. "Then I can get back to being truly me!"

Fury is extremely comfortable with who she is now, in spite of the temporary and short-lived attacks of feminine wiles. "I want to be liked for who I am, because it (a relationship) won't work if I'm not in integrity."

Sydney's feminine name--her real name--makes it clear what her identity is, but Sydney thought that spelled out "weakness" and would have preferred a genderless name.

I think it would be fun not to have such a feminine name. When I opened my first checking account I decided to use my initials and my last name instead of my first name so no one would immediately say, 'She's female. She's vulnerable.'

Perhaps Sydney's strong sense of self, feeling in control of herself and her actions, and being comfortable with strong opinions based on her capabilities, comes from that determination to be herself. Sydney seems to agree with JB's desire to do "what I want to do and apologize later."

Elizabeth had only one thing to say regarding her feelings about identifying herself as a tomboy, "Looking at all the sissy girls with all their bows-- Thank God I wasn't like that!"

Lynn's voice rose in a show of deep feeling when she talked about the word tomboy being "a demeaning term for girls who are physically active." She felt the use of the term tended to limit physical activity and the healthy, creative outlets that outdoor activity provides for girls. "To block young women from that

kind of play inhibits a whole level of learning." She spoke easily about the confidence, the independence and the learning experiences open to girls and women who identify with being tomboys and are comfortable with that identity.

"I always thought I was pretty hot stuff," said Annie, "and comfortable with who I was. I had no trouble rebelling against all those girlie things." Annie also tended to do what she wanted to do and apologize for it later, and loved to challenge the system. "I grew up doing pretty much whatever I wanted, and I was always trying to see what I could get away with. And it was a lot!" She referred to herself and small band of friends as the "resident hellions in the village" and, like JB, remains proud of the mischief she could stir up. Annie also feels that her "wacko sense of humor" is what often eliminated some of the apologizing for her love of new adventures and encouraged her to think up creative activities, regardless of the consequences. To this day "a sense of humor will win me over or get me out of trouble."

Sarah also shares a warm sense of humor with the other tomboys in this study, although hers seems to be particularly dry, sensitive, yet right to the point. Sarah felt strongly that a sense of humor is a trait tomboys probably share in abundance. "Tomboys have more of a sense of humor. About themselves and everything else. And Lord knows they tell better dirty jokes!" (There was a great deal of laughing in all the tomboy interviews, and a sense of pride in tomboy misadventures. This interview with Sarah was particularly hilarious. Sarah may have discovered another finding, that tomboys share a love of humor.)

"And I think we're a lot more fun," Sarah insisted. "I really do! We are

definitely NOT frou-frou!" Sarah laughed at her inability to ever figure out which socks were supposed to match with which sweater, and her complete lack of interest in the trials of matching up clothes. She then launched into a discussion about tomboy traits of being energetic and active and always thinking of new adventures. "After all, who wants to sit around with a bunch of wusses? All they do is worry about their hair and their nails!" Sarah summed up her tomboy pride as, "I just think tomboys have more opportunity to do more on this earth."

Sue was able to laugh at herself and many of the situations she found herself in each day, and felt being a tomboy was a tremendous asset because when in a competitive situation, tomboys tend to "work towards getting two winners, not just one." She prides herself on her independence and the "guts", as JB would say, to "not be willing to settle for less than my best."

Social Norms

"When you don't fit social norms, and that's essentially what a tomboy is. . .then you go through some times that are really rough, but they make you stronger, they make you learn what your core values are, and make you comfortable with those core values." (Michael)

Michael was well aware of the fact that she knew who she was and also that she felt like an outsider. "Your style, or your ideal style has been set, and what happens if you don't fit that model? Well, you feel like another, you feel somehow you're not good enough but yet that's not what you want to be." And yet Michael does not remember being negatively affected by this. "I felt kind of

alienated from what was considered to be the in-crowd. But it wasn't devastating to be that way. You had your own friends, and your own friends were like you."

"I was not a Cinderella, " Fury insisted with a laugh. "No, I was *not* a Cinderella. And I wasn't a prince. I was probably a frog!" she added with a long laugh. "I didn't fit any of it, I was more like an observer, because there were no roles that I resonated with in those fairy tales." But being outside the traditional female circle did not completely block Fury's goals. "I was driven. There's something about going where your drive is, regardless of what the norms were." Fury, like Annie, feels she has almost been on a roller coaster, sliding down into traditional ways for a time then discovering that her drive to be herself, and to express her own core values, is so powerful that she must take the exhilarating ride to the top. "Sometimes I felt funny and smart and capable," reported Annie, "other times like I'd never fit in anywhere. Now I can laugh, but back then [earlier years] it hurt like hell."

The cultural role model of Cinderella popped up in several of the interviews with the tomboys, and they often mentioned how their own daughters are being given the same subordinate messages. The fairy tales "are so wimpy," said Annie. "They weren't real. When I read them to my daughter I changed half the endings so that half the time the girls won in the end. When she learned to read for herself she had a real shock!"

Sue sends the same message to her two daughters. "They talk about wanting to live a certain lifestyle," she said with a shake of the head. But she keeps sending the message that education, and the willingness to be competitive

and self reliant, are critical for today's world. "Don't ever take a back seat!" she tells them. "You never know when something will happen. Be able to take care of yourself." Sue spoke of a study she had recently read on an airplane in which all the Disney movies were ranked on issues of independence, being in control of one's own destiny, and how well these female Disney characters would survive in today's world. "It was hilarious!" she said, "I wished I'd saved it." Apparently Snow White, Cinderella, and all the other female characters would have been lost in today's environment. "And the Little Mermaid was the worst! She was dominated by everybody, her father, her husband, a CRAB! Everybody in the ocean! She even gave up the whole ocean!" Sue then added that in *The Beauty and the Beast*, the Beauty was the only character who was rated as

intelligent, and she was pretty, she shunned the creep of the village who everybody else was fawning over, she saved the Beast, she saved her dad. She was the only one who rated an A! Everybody else was lucky to get a C+. Most got D's or F's.

Sue went on to say that although she is sending her daughters the message that it is acceptable to live outside the world of social norms, only her younger daughter seems to be listening. In fact, the younger one has always shown an independent streak. "The younger one played with a Barbie doll once [at a friend's house]. She was much more intrigued with making the [Barbie] house work. Making the little elevator go up, making sure the chimney was on right, in terms of construction." Apparently the only interest this daughter had in dolls was "to take them into the bathtub, pull off their heads and fill them with

water." The older daughter, however, now 14, clearly marches to the standard social norms for girls. "She's. . . (long pause) a *cheerleader*." Laughing, with eyebrows arched and hands turned upward to emphasize her question, Sue added, "What else can I say?" Sue reported that the daughter still "gets good grades, but I have to push her to go see teachers if there's a problem."

Only the younger daughter, the tomboy, seems to be truly resonating to her mother's message about building individual core values. Sue commented that the older one was quieter and more docile from birth, and the second one "arrived squawking and hasn't stopped since" giving additional validity to the beliefs Lynn has that tomboys are like a segment of all mammals, genetically programmed with a penchant for high activity and plenty of energy. Both Sue and Lynn believed the current climate is more relaxed for girls who go against social norms, but they questioned the power of a culture that can still make these girls lose--or subvert--their naturalness.

Sydney learned the cultural message in grade school, and talked about it with anger still coloring her words. "Very early I picked up the fact that the girl was to be thought of as a second class citizen." Her own sense of strength carried her through all challenges with no feeling of subordination, however, until college. She was unable to find the university support for her chosen field of architecture and finally buckled under to conformity. "Why did we buy into all that?" she wondered now, shaking her head and sharing her current feelings of disgust and anger that she was unable to continue walking outside the narrow range of acceptable female behavior, and unable to hold tight to her core

academic values and goals.

"I always thought of you as kind of Bohemian," a friend once told Elizabeth, who still takes great pride in that assessment. "Didn't bother me a bit!" she exclaimed. Sarah laughed at the styles of clothing, with the matching sweaters and skirts that were all the rage when she was in high school. "Never did get that together!" she added with a laugh. And she never had the slightest interest, then or now, in trying to dress in a perfectly matched style. Comfort, casualness, and ease of activity remains far more important in clothing selection, as it seems to be to all the tomboys in this study.

Lynn took another approach to this spontaneous topic:

The whole attitude at the time, which troubled me deeply, was that girls who are popular are girls who don't talk. . . . You go on a date, ask the boy what HE likes, play up to the boy, learn to talk about football, ask him about HIS car. And I was really offended! I really did not understand it. I was offended. And I refused to buy *Seventeen* magazine!

Lynn also wondered why so many girls "bought into more than we should have" and accepted the cultural restrictions, as Sydney discussed.

The themes of suppressing individual natural abilities to fit a cultural expectation remained consistent throughout the interviews, and the usual response ran from disgust to anger to a sense of having "sold out" to the establishment, at least for a time, much to their current regret. Although these particular tomboys seemed to accept the restrictive cultural messages to act in a more socially approved feminine manner, they remember holding fast to a

rebellious core that percolated under the surface until they felt they could reclaim their naturalness. Sinclair summed it up well. After eight years of a difficult situation, she made up her mind that, "I was never going to be submissive again." For these ten tomboys, rough times seemed to solidify their resolution to go back to being themselves and being true to their own value systems.

Relationships

The second major theme deals with relationships the tomboys have had within their family of origin, with peers, with co-workers, and finally with themselves. As the Personal Networks Group (Eds). (1989) wrote, "Feminists have long noted the special reliance of women upon the resources of networks of family and kin, and the important role women play in nurturing and maintaining such networks" (p. 20). A discussion of women's relationships must include a look at the direct lives of women and the sense they have of themselves as defined not only by their relationships with others, but in recognizing the relationship they have with themselves.

I discovered that nine out of the ten tomboys in this study reported strong family ties, particularly with their fathers or older brothers. All the mothers of these tomboys seemed to be liked, and respected, but the indoor world of female activities was not appealing to any of these tomboys. None of them reported spending any more time than they felt they had to within the domestic realm of their home lives. Nine of the ten tomboys had strong and positive feelings for their fathers, or older brother(s), but the one tomboy who did not fit this pattern

has maintained a particularly strong sense of self and a determination to follow her own path regardless of positive or negative influences. There was such a determination among these women to choose allies and friends among like-minded individuals, or to find others who resonated with them, that I continually felt a sense of strength coming from the stories of their lives.

It is not unusual for anyone to search out friends and associates with whom one feels a kinship or sameness; indeed, this is well known as a common phenomenon. In this case the relationships of tomboys are no different than those of anyone else, male or female. It was also not unusual to discover that, like many others, tomboys tended to be critical of others who were not like them. In this study, however, it was interesting to discover the names they used to denigrate women who were particularly feminine in their behavior and looks, names like "ultra-fems" and "prissies" and "frou-frous" often spoken with a scornful look or laughter at their "silly girlie ways." Several tomboys referred to these women as "selling out" their true selves in order to create relationships that were supportive, and they thought that "selling out" was not only unnecessary but an artificial way to live. Many of these tomboys deeply regretted the strict restrictions that they accepted in order to get along with others.

Family of Origin

"My older brother was one of the best rolemodels

I had, and he would always stand up for me.

My folks were also supportive, as were

all my aunts and uncles." (Annie)

Annie's older brother was "a wild Irish kid and I was determined to keep up with him." The fact that he allowed her to tag along, and taught her how to shoot a rifle, swim, and play baseball, encouraged her high level of physical activity. Annie was the middle child and only girl in her immediate family, but she also spent a great deal of time with her 12 cousins, their parents, and one unmarried aunt and uncle (the favorites) who were extremely supportive. Her mother was often sick, but even when well she let Annie be herself:

Once, when Mom heard that I'd been smoking on the back of the church roof with my best friend, she mentioned the adventure at the dinner table and her relief we hadn't burned the church down. Then she smiled. That was pretty much the way I was raised, with a little advice, a lot of smiles. Annie always felt close to her mother, particularly when she became an adult. "We used to brag that the women in our family were really close," Annie remembered, "But that didn't mean I was going to learn to cook. No way!"

Annie's father always told her she could "be anything you want to be. And if you mess up, we'll always be behind you." Although he commuted to work and was not home a great deal, his support was always understood.

Annie's younger brother was sickly as a child with a heart murmur, so "with my mom and little brother home sick, and Dad working long hours, [my older brother] and I just ran wild." They grew up in a country town that believed in the expression that "it takes a whole village to raise a child." Since "it was a very loosey-goosey, permissive type of raising, we felt free" to explore their world. "The only time I got into trouble was when I galloped (my horse) down the

middle of Main Street in a hurry to get home, and several old ladies called my mother to complain." The calls did not stop the galloping. "Did it anyway." The favorite Uncle had taught Annie to ride, and often went riding with her on his own horse. "Riding was great," Annie reported. "When my brothers were bugging me, I just took off."

Sarah's major influence was also an older brother. Her mother died when she was young, and they had a succession of housekeepers. Sarah remembers spending time showing off her knowledge of batting averages to her brother and his friends, and she was proud of the fact he looked out for her and taught her new skills. She often followed him in play activities, but since she was not allowed on formal teams, she, like the other tomboys, found their outlets in sandlot ball.

When Sarah's father remarried, "I sort of resented my stepmother. I just didn't pay any attention to her." Sarah's father died young too, a few years after her mother. She was often left to her own devices as a child and found herself participating in as many of her brother's activities as she could get into. Sarah also avoided domestic duties when possible, and although she is a wonderful cook now, she would "rather be on my bike outdoors."

Lynn had a brother 18 months older, as well as two younger siblings, and felt they were very free in their childhood. She has "no complaints at all" about the way she was raised, and speaks fondly of her family. Her "parents didn't squelch" her high energy; they encouraged it, telling her to "Go ahead and ride bikes and climb trees." She was free to do any physical activity she chose, and

often the whole family would play softball or a sport together. "My father gave us, all four of us, two boys and two girls, tiny tool sets. It was wonderful. We had little tool boxes, little hammers, and he put little vises on little work benches." There seemed to be no gender restrictions in Lynn's childhood.

Lynn, as did most the other tomboys, reported her parents always saying to her, "Do your best! You're smart! Go for it!" This encouragement continued throughout her education. "By the time I hit my Senior year I was very restless and they let me take University classes, as did the other students, mostly boys who were very advanced in math and physics." Lynn then addressed parenting styles in general:

There are obviously parents who want to be encouraging to women, because you don't want to have people feel that the culture is so overwhelming, obviously, that you don't stand a chance. Parents can make an enormous difference. An enormous difference, including supportive fathers.

Lynn stated that parents can encourage both genders by taking them all out to play sports together. "I also think that a mother is extremely important for a girl. So if you have a mother who also thinks (physical activity) is wonderful, who does things, who bikes," she will be a good role model for a tomboy rather than a woman with few physical interests. Lynn, unlike the other tomboys in this study, remembered engaging in many traditional feminine activities:

I loved dolls and had dozens of them, only my dolls had adventures. They were Indian dolls or adventure dolls and they went over waterfalls in tiny

boats or marched through the jungles of Africa (my mother's garden) or set out of the Oregon Trail (also the garden; it was a versatile place). I also loved (and still love) to spin, weave, embroider, do beadwork, and bake (not cook).

Elizabeth's mother fits a far more traditional mold. "My mother always strikes me as feminine, frail, kind of.. I think I almost tried to be the opposite!" Elizabeth had an older brother also, but remembers one of her strongest influences as a child was a neighbor boy. "My best friend growing up was A.J., who had horses at the end of the block." Elizabeth would start her day knocking at his door and spend the day outdoors taking care of and enjoying their horses.

The next several tomboys interviewed did not report an older brother, but felt very close to their fathers. "I was always outside," said Fury, "riding my horse, fishing, helping my dad, branding cattle, castrating them. Until I hit about 12 and couldn't stand to see things hurt anymore!" Fury chose not to give up other outdoor activities, but did not want to be indoors with her sister. "She and my mom were always in the house doing things and I felt odd. But still I felt strength and felt odd because my sense of humor was different from theirs."

And although Fury chose not to participate in the kitchen duties, she kept a close eye on her sister's actions. "I can remember always watching my sister, she was my nemesis in some ways, and how I would pretend, I would try to act like she did, with the giggling." The coyness and the giggling were uncomfortable for Fury, however, and she kept true to her feelings about who she was:

I would talk to the boys and say, 'I cannot be like that, you need to know that. I can't be like that. I know she's beautiful, and I know she's far prettier than I am, but I like to be outside, I like to do other things, and that's the kind of person I am.'

Fury talked for a few minutes about her mother, with whom she feels very close now:

The epilogue in all this, particularly my mother, in the last 4-5 years, she's 65 now, realized the error of her ways and is now wanting to read all my feminist books and is finally, finally seeing how she's sublimated her needs and brilliance to a man, and also to a society that really didn't know what it wanted except to keep people in control.

Fury and her mother currently enjoy long talks about women's issues.

Michael, the older of two children with a younger brother, also avoided feminine activities in her youth and preferred her father's company. But she also discovered a closeness with her mother when she was an adult, and talked openly about her family. Michael reported

I very much identified with my father. I was never in touch with [my feminine side] except when I was around my mother. Now my mother was very feminine, and I kind of rejected that side of me. I didn't want to know how to cook. I just didn't learn things that maybe a lot of 'normal' women would learn. I can remember my mother trying to teach me to cook. "Excuuuse me!" I'd say. "I'm not going to do that!"

But Michael entered young adulthood realizing that her close identification

with her father, and her emulation of him, "was not the way to be, the way to win friends. I had taken on everything I disliked about how he acted with other people, but as a male you can do it and (for me) it was unacceptable." She drew closer to her mother in these years, especially when her mother developed a heart problem and was sick for many years. But she also remained close to her father because he was "kind of the mom and dad in the months that she would be in the hospital. Dad knew how to cook and iron and all that stuff. Lord knows I didn't!"

Michael's closeness with her mother at the end of her mother's life was a joyful time:

She was probably the one woman that I could talk to so much. We used to talk about women's issues, different things. She had her feminist streak but it didn't manifest itself until we were out of the house. It was a decision she made because she thought it would be better for her kids to live in an environment that didn't include argument. So that was her decision.

Michael recognized the decisions many women make to keep a peaceful house, and accepted her mother's decision to raise her family with as little turmoil as possible. Her mother was a product of her time. When Michael's mother died, Michael felt a tremendous loss:

I think my mother's death in some ways caused a crisis. I think losing your mother is probably the hardest thing you ever have to go through. And we had such a good relationship, we were such good friends as

adults, and I always had that support system to fall back on.

The pain of losing her mother reappears often, especially when Michael is cooking:

I can remember after my mother died, there was one particular dish that I liked, and I didn't know how to make it. And I never asked her! My female resource was gone, and it took me awhile to realize how much this meant in my life.

Sydney, the older of two girls, also spoke fondly of her family, remembering the influences of her parents:

I had real strong role models in my mother and father. My father, particularly, was the strong silent type, was not very communicative, and yet I knew he loved me. I very early identified with him. And I think I probably got from him the whole idea that women can be pretty silly. He didn't treat my mother that way, because she was very strong too. But there were times when I could sense that he thought, 'What are you talking about that for, that's too ridiculous to even talk about!'

Sydney assigned herself the role of her father's male offspring at an early age:

For some reason I felt like he's missing something because he doesn't have a son, so I kind of aligned myself with him very early on. I sort of aligned myself with him because he was surrounded by women and I felt sorry for him! And I learned to shoot a gun, because that's what he did. He put (me) through a hunter safety course, and I enjoyed it, I loved it. Her father's profession also had an impact of Sydney. "He was an

engineer. And I loved the way he printed, lettered. Very neat. He was the one to help me with my math and science." Sydney believed her lifelong love of math and sciences and architecture came from her father's influence. "I also think I admire my Dad," Sydney continued, "because he came from a noneducated family, Pennsylvania Dutch. His mother didn't go beyond 6th grade or so. She was just a workhorse." Sydney shook her head at the memory. "He came out and put himself through college, on his own. I have a whole lot of respect for my Dad." Sydney paused for a few moments, then added

Thinking back on it now, I don't know why I aligned myself so much with my father. It wasn't that I didn't like what my mother stood for, or was. I realize now that she was a real strong person and the person who interacted with the family, who kept things going smoothly, a real role model for me. I respected her and she could help me with my writing, English and History because that was her strong suit. Yet I didn't identify with her because she's a woman. At that time things female were just not as good, I thought.

It was not until later that Sydney

accepted the female part as what society said to do. It was accepted because my mother and grandmother were very strong people, and well educated. My grandmother went to business college, because college wasn't available to her, and she ran my grandfather's business. She was bright and snappy as a whip. She could play a hand of bridge and remember it two years later! Very strong women on both sides.

Sydney summed up her feelings about her family with a mixture of love, gratitude and regret that she moved to California, so far away from her East Coast parents. The memory brought tears to her eyes. "The parental ties are very important once you have kids. I took my kids back once a year and that wasn't enough. What a wonderful resource and fun my kids could have had with their grandparents that they missed because we were too far away!" Her sons are grown now and beginning to scatter, and Sydney recognized the travelling pattern she had followed was now taking place in her own children. She continues to credit her parents for allowing her to grow up freely and encouraging her to be her own person developing her own talents.

Sue is also the oldest child, with two younger sisters, and shared Sydney's history of taking on a male role in a family with a self-made father:

My family had three girls. So I was always called my father's only son.

That was my role, my father's only son. And the message he always sent was, 'You can do anything and be anything you want to if you want it bad enough.' Since he had no sons, this was his only chance! And I got that message. And I think it had to come from my Dad. He came from a real deprived background, through the depression. So he worked very hard and tried to give that message to us, my sisters and me. I probably chewed on it more than the other two.

Sue also shares with Sydney a family background that maintained a strict code of discipline and rules:

My upbringing had been very disciplined, and you did as you were told.

Fortunately, [I had] a father that even though the road was straight and narrow, he also sent the message that you had what it took to do stuff.

And do whatever you want to do, no matter what the competition.

Sue spoke very little about her mother, except to say, in reference to her father's advice to be the best you possibly can:

My mother couldn't have given me that message anyway. Even to this day my sisters have said to me occasionally that they feel that my mother is a little intimidated by my success. Proud, but intimidated. And other times she compares me to my Dad, both good and bad!

Sue laughed easily, then summed up her feelings on family. "I think to be a successful woman, in terms of what we think of success, tomboys really have to have their father's support."

"Damn, you should have been a boy!" Sinclair's uncle used to say to her, and she was proud that he felt that way. Sinclair, the younger of two girls, had a fairly disciplined home growing up, as did several other tomboys, but does not speak of a particularly strong identification with her father:

It wasn't a real strict home, but we definitely had boundaries in what was right and what was wrong and what was expected of us. Both our parents were strict, yet very open. I think we were afraid of our father, just because of his sternness, and whenever he spoke that was law around the house. You never talked back to him, you kept your mouth shut, you didn't express any feelings. That was the way I grew up.

Sinclair seemed to resonate more with her mother within the family

structure and didn't chaff at the domestic duties assigned to females. "Mother never stifled my freedom. I don't ever remember her telling us not to do anything." Sinclair added with a laugh, "I guess I wasn't told 'no' much because I was such a good little girl! They didn't have any problem with me, all was fine through high school." Sinclair seemed to comfortably absorb both the female world and the male world. She remembered being a good girl for her mother and relishing her uncle's compliment that she should have been a boy. Unlike the other tomboys, she did not rebel at sewing class in high school, and cheerfully shortened her skirts to keep up with current fashion. Blue jeans, however, remained her attire of choice when not in school.

JB, the one tomboy in this study who marched to the same drummer as the other nine tomboys but chose different marching steps, had three older brothers in "an exceedingly sexist family" who favored calling her a "mop-squeezer" or "housemouse" and "other kinds of derogatory words to define women. Probably acting like my father taught them." JB, the youngest, learned not to complain to her parents because if she did, one brother would "beat the holy living daylights out of me." JB credits these bad experiences to her life long determination, as talked about in the physical activity section, to "level the playing field" in her choices of activities.

JB learned early that what her father stood for, in terms of his demeaning of women, applied to her as well. "I think Dad did a whole lot to undermine [my goals]. Dad had a real hard time with me my whole life, as long as he was alive." This memory stirred up other memories, and JB leaned back in her chair to

share her story with a quiet, calm voice:

When I was nine and fell off a horse and broke my arm, I was in the hospital three weeks. [Dad] never bothered to show up, except for one time on Christmas morning when I'd just had surgery and was heavily sedated. That was the only time in three weeks he showed up to say hi.

JB thought for a moment before she said:

As soon as I started to become a beautiful young girl, as an adolescent, he all of a sudden wanted to invite me to Rotary Clubs, started taking me out to lunch, to 'get to know his daughter better'. That too really pissed me off! I could see what was going on with him, where his value system was. And also to see his value system caused my mother a great deal of pain too.

JB found more support from her mother, who drove her to classes in music, fencing, and other sports. Apparently this support was also conditional:

I think probably the only thing I felt support for from her was my music.

She did not support me in my physical activities at all! She would support me in terms of doing art work, and music, and theater, or things that had to do with arts and talents. We were back in that old social slot!"

Although JB's stories elicited a tone of regret, she always added a touch of humor and laughter to the tough times and moved smoothly, by her own choice, into areas that were more positive.

All tomboys spoke easily of times that were negative, frustrating, or

hurtful, but never dwelled on these aspects. For most of the interviews, the tone was decidedly upbeat and positive, and it is clear that nine tomboy women give credit to the males in their families of origin for much of their strengths to remain true to their own personalities, especially during childhood years.

Peers

"When I was in high school I had some girl friends who were similar, who were athletes. We had boy friends who liked the way we were. We didn't play coy, we didn't do seductive stuff. We were certainly not like THOSE girls!" (Fury)

As youngsters and teenagers the world over, the tomboys in this study preferred to associate with friends who resonated with their feelings and beliefs. These tomboys were definite in their choices of friends and tended to make fun of the girls who were following the feminine model. "We were friendly with them," Fury said, "but I couldn't identify with them at all." Fury laughed as she admitted, referring to both those adolescent years and her current feelings, "I wanted to be drop dead gorgeous. I still want to be drop dead gorgeous. But I want it for being me, not for being a stereotype. I want to be different and have my beauty recognized."

Annie "always felt a little bit different and didn't like many girls. I had friends who were girls but who, like me, didn't want to do girl things. I guess you could say I self-selected friends as outdoor, athletic kinds of girls." Annie had been accepted at Scripps College for Women, but the tuition was too steep

for the family so she went to a large state university. Annie made her way by joining a sorority. Found a great group of tomboys to hang out with, but we still had to do a lot of girly stuff. We had accepted the rules of girl behavior by then and could act feminine if we had to.

Annie made it clear they did not choose to act particularly feminine unless the situation called for it, like attending a dance. "We just did our own thing, like starting an interfraternity-sorority softball tournament, and had our own fun with guys on equal terms." The preferred terms were athletic playing fields.

Being friends with boys was a common theme for these tomboys. "We had tons of male friends," said Annie. "We could have both male and female friends, but the really prissy girls didn't seem to have many friends at all" of either male or female gender. "They were always chasing boys, talking about them, parading them. We made fun of them mercilessly, or just ignored them."

Sinclair also had her own fun with both boys and girls, always outside and usually playing sports. She remembers the difficulty of being "the new kid in school" at age eleven:

I remember standing on the playground and looking for somebody, anybody, that girl I'd met before. And I just felt so awkward! Finally I saw that girl and I walked over to her and just butted in. And they sort of included me after that.

Sinclair was more likely to go along with the traditional patterns in school than some of the other tomboys, but only for a short time. "I wore skirts just to be like everybody else," she reported. "But (I felt) the lack of freedom becoming a girl in

high school. Being a goody-two shoes, having to dress just so, and having to be prim and proper for the boys, going through all that." Going to college was when Sinclair decided she had made "a complete escape! Wow!" She could dress as she pleased and wear pants to class because she entered college the first year the dress code changed. Her individual style reasserted itself quickly, and by the next year Sinclair began to see boys in a new light.

Sarah and Elizabeth echoed their dislike of spending time with what Sarah called "the frou-frous." She spoke fondly of her college friends, "I think we cared much more about each other than we did about a stupid fix-up date. We'd rather spend time together. I'd rather be sticking with my girl friends." Elizabeth echoed her preference for spending time with the boys who were her friends:

I did have a boyfriend all my freshman year (in high school) but he was in Future Farmers of America so he was into the animals, and going to the Fair, and I loved that! I've always been attracted to males who were either athletic or liked the outdoors.

Sue labeled her interest in having both male and female friends as "buddies who went out together." She "didn't have a lot of girlfriends, didn't have a huge circle of friends." She preferred a few special friends who shared her riding interests. Then she clarified, "I just wasn't interested in the idle chitchat and gossip and beauty queens in high school. I had boy friends, but it was not the long term sorts of friends, even in high school. Buddies that went out." Sue made a powerful point when she discussed the peer influence--or lack thereof--in her life when she talked about the message she was getting that girls are

supposed to accept their cultural role to act and dress in a ladylike manner, have lots of dates and boyfriends, and maintain their eventual marriage as a primary focus. This message was "mostly from other girls. When you heard that message, it was other girls who said that to you. 'Are you going to the dance? What are you going to wear?' I'd rather be with my horse!"

The pressure to conform to feminine standards continued in college: When I graduated from college, my best friend from high school was getting married. I was in her wedding Christmas of our senior year in college. And she just looked at me, saying 'You're not going with anybody? What ARE you going to do?' No, the message came from other girls.

Sue felt she deflected the messages by being so comfortable with herself:

People knew that I was strong person. And I think that strong people exude a different message. So peer pressure was not an issue for me. Although there were times when, as a tomboy and you're doing these things, you still had girls over here with their 'chit-chit-chit' (said in a high falsetto voice) and you're not part of it, and you would feel left out. At which time I'd go riding! I was pretty independent even through junior high and high school."

This independent streak, and preference for male friends, emerged in conversations with other tomboys in this study as well. "My friend Joe," Michael said with a smile, "and I were inseparable. We spent four years together. I began dating when I was 16 and Joe went on all my dates with me!" It was so

traumatic when Michael had to tell Joe he could no longer come along, she "almost quit dating because of it." Michael was selective in the girls she chose as friends, reporting, "the friends that I had that were females were like me in my teens and early 20s. But I know there were guys, in fact quite a few, who wouldn't date me because I didn't act like they thought women should act, and one actually said that to me."

Michael talked for quite awhile about her preference for male friends, her ability to "speak their language" and how this preference eventually became very uncomfortable for her:

I always had a lot of male friends, and maybe not as many female friends as other people had. Because I saw things more their (male) way. I wanted to be with the men more than the women, because women only talked about children, clothes, and stuff I really was not interested in. Yet if you went to where the men were and stayed in their conversations the women did not like that at all, that was not acceptable and after awhile the men don't like it either. It took me a long time to work through that, and I did it by withdrawing. I just didn't want to participate if I couldn't participate in the way I wanted to.

Michael paused a moment then added, "It's more feeling like a man, not like a woman, and not being able to participate in that way."

The conversation stopped for a few minutes as Michael gathered her thoughts before continuing her story:

When I was in college, many of my friends were male. At that time you

could have male friends without the sexual or romantic part, and once I got in my 20s that wasn't as easy any more. It became unacceptable because your male friends had a wife, and that wife didn't look too highly on this because most women could not understand a friend relationship. Michael summed up her remembrances of these challenging friendships by saying, "I tended to have more effeminate male friends, so my "other half" was always there. It wasn't until I didn't have my other half that it became an issue."

For Sydney, friendships were not an issue, she had close friends among both male and female peers. She remembered that for many years she worked almost exclusively with males and thought nothing of it. As a young married woman Sydney was "in all my glory" raising two sons. "I had a ball with those boys!" Her focus seemed to expand to include women as she approached midlife. "I realize now that women have very good strengths. I'm much more in tune with women now than I definitely am with men. And I realize now that I much prefer being a woman than a man."

Lynn remembered always being comfortable with both genders, and remains so today. She remembered her college days, however, which were a terrible period for women. They can say they're changing [colleges] but that was a very difficult time. And that was the time when women leaders were coming out of the women's schools. Like Hillary Rodham Clinton. Basically our generation. And I think I would have been much better off in an all women's school, rather than co-ed.

Lynn thought that the feminist movement has helped our cultural expectations by

sending the message that "women are people too. Accepting the whole range of skills and abilities that aren't divided by gender. And everybody should have the right to develop them."

JB prefaced her discussion of peer friendships by saying she was busy "ranging over the Nevada desert and letting myself explore what was available" and not spending a lot of time with youngsters her own age. There is also a thread of JB's determination to be her own person beginning early in childhood. "I had a little girl friend who lived about a mile from me. We had this debate about sweeping and it came time when we had to take home economics as a requirement, which pissed me off thoroughly!" JB laughed at the memory:

The conversation we had was over sweeping the floor and how to do it correctly. We both decided we weren't going to learn because we were going to have different lives from what our mothers had. And the following day she came back, and had conversed with her family about it, and she had decided that that was all she was going to have in her life, so she better do it correctly. And I just got quiet and kind of moved away from her and made my resolve even firmer that I wasn't going to do that.

The peer friendships that these tomboys recalled create a pattern of strong desires to have friends who shared similar interests, regardless of gender, and an unwillingness to compromise just for the sake of having more friends. Michael's discussion of balancing her personality, that leaned to the male side, with "effeminate male friends" was not articulated by the others, but it seems clear that for these tomboys, the goal was to have males as friends without

having to deal with the raging hormones that began to dominate their high school relationships. Several tomboys related their surprise when their male friends deserted them for the "prissy" girls when choosing partners for dances or social events. Or, as one tomboy reported with shock, her former buddies suddenly began to grope and touch and hint at physical activities that were outside her definition of friendship. The rules had suddenly changed, and as Michael and Annie reported, "We lost some of our best friends."

There was virtually no discussion about peer relationships in the years between college and midlife, but these tomboys do report a current shift in their friendships. In their younger years they often preferred to be with males, and made fun of feminine girls. These women still enjoy the company of men, but as Michael reported, the culture--and many wives--simply do not seem to understand the tomboy desire for non-sexual male friendships, thus many of these tomboys have settled for limited male companionship. In this stage of their lives, with more maturity and life experience behind them, they report feeling much more comfortable with women. They feel that they understand other women better, have far more respect for the choices that women have made in their lives, and value female friendships more highly.

Career Choices/Coworkers

"Being a tomboy had a dramatic affect on my career
as an anthropologist, a field anthropologist,
which is my great love." (Lynn)

The ten tomboys in this study reported that the directions their lives have

taken, and the careers they have chosen, have been directly affected by being a tomboy. Lynn focused on the nature of her job. "I love the physicality of it. I love to spend the entire summer, which sounds crazy to some people, knocking myself out going up and down hills." Lynn's enthusiasm kicked up a notch as she pulled out some pictures of her recent travels in Peru to share her adventures:

You're going into some of the most spectacular country on Earth! And into Inca ruins you can only get to on foot. Of course they didn't have ropes, they had six foot wide stone footpaths, and it was all foot travel. You can see some very exciting things, but you cannot be fifty pounds overweight, sedentary, and have these experiences.

Lynn, who said she has been fascinated by anthropology ever since she can remember, returned to graduate work as "an older student" and will receive her Ph.D. from a prominent California university in 1996. She hopes to expand her trekking adventures into other parts of the world, although her current research is in Peru. "The first and foremost criteria is really just physical. To go from 8000 feet to 14000 feet and do it in a day." Lynn arrives in the country a few days early to "run up and down hills" to help get her acclimatized. She also bragged about some of the older women who have trekked with her and kept up with her pace. "I've had 65, 70 year old women, just like little tractors!"

Being in charge of one's own decisions and lifestyle is a common refrain from these tomboys. Just as Lynn chose her own anthropological paths, JB made her decisions about career at a young age. "One of the things I figured out

very early was that I was going to have to be my own boss. That, and I had to be a professional." JB sat in silent reflection for a few minutes, then added

I would have been a geologist except for the fact that I'm a strawberry blonde and I can get second degree sunburns. You can't be a geologist and not be out in the field! And they didn't have sunscreen at that time. I chose psych over music because I didn't like the lifestyle that I saw musicians leading. It looked pretty tough. I love music, and I find its absolutely healing, there's a vibrancy, an excitement about making music that's creative.

JB leaned back in her chair and began to choose her words carefully:

But in music, I thought I would not be able to protect myself as well from men. And I needed something that I was going to be able to really fight off men, in terms of having conflicts, and in music you have that. I knew I had to choose a career in which I could be in control of myself. I just had too many men trying, using positions of power, to push their sexual issues on me.

JB's voice regained a normal pitch as she talked about the influences on her decision to become a psychologist. The different lifestyles and psychological issues among the wide variety of people JB encountered growing up in Las Vegas, from country ranchers to the slick city people, especially women, seemed to have had a direct effect by stimulating her intellectual curiosity to explore psychology, a career she thoroughly enjoys.

Sydney also combined intellectually exciting challenges with her tomboy

desire to "do my own thing," but ran into hurdles that created a rocky career path:

I really wanted to be an architect. For some reason I picked up early that I wanted to be an architect. There was the engineering from my Dad, I had artistic stuff. But I didn't pursue it because I thought you had to be a natural artist. But nobody told me you didn't have to be a natural artist!

Sydney remembered the solid support and encouragement she had received up until the time she was in the coeducational college. As she spoke of the history classes, her voice became strong and agitated, her anger still close to the surface so many years later. "The history was a bear to me. I realized this was "ALL THAT MALE WAR STUFF! I don't need this! I actually flunked a history course that first year!" Sydney's sense of humor returned quickly as she added with a laugh, "I should have dropped it, but I certainly didn't know I was going to fail it." Her career path then took a side road. "I first thought I'd go into Chemistry but ran into a buzz saw in quantitative analysis." Sydney described another hurdle when the instructor gave exams with material she had never seen before. "So naturally I went into math. But then I realized that wasn't the right fit either. I'm not conceptual as some of the other guys are."

Sydney's desire to stay true to her talents reasserted itself, and after graduation she worked at one of the University of California campuses "where I had my pick of jobs. I picked administrative assistant to the campus architect." After a year Sydney was asked to return to the east to work for NASA for several years. "That was the greatest thing I ever did! It didn't matter to NASA if you

were male or female. I was working on projects, tracking satellites for the Apollo program. I had a ball!" Sydney's voice and enthusiasm polished the confidence in her words. "I could do it. I could handle it. I learned how to program big computers, assembly language."

Marriage moved Sydney back to the west coast, where her career took an interesting turn when she was immediately hired by the Navy. "I got on designing communications systems for the Nimitz carrier. I was doing something exciting, fun, and I wasn't anybody's secretary!" The next career break came when she decided to take time out have a family. After getting her two sons launched into grade school, Sydney continued to work with computers in small local companies where she could control her hours. She continues as a computer programmer today. For her entire work experience Sydney has always worked with men, a fact that she said she had never really thought about until this interview. She felt being a tomboy was a big help to her in a primarily male work environment:

I had a strong sense of self that I could deal with these men on my own.

That I could do anything they asked me to. I could handle the computer stuff, I wasn't intimidated. In fact, I could show them what to do with it!

Sydney often told her employers which program was needed for the office, bought it, then proceeded to install the new software in the computer system. She added with a small laugh, "I did see that I was very strong, always. I just knew I was capable of doing things."

Sinclair also took a few detours before claiming one direction and

remaining there for her working life. As some the previous tomboys, Sinclair chose an uncommon path for her early years:

Originally I was planning to go into medical technology, because I like lab work. I don't know if that's a tomboy thing or not, but at the time I really enjoyed it. I liked working with my hands, doing things that way. Then I had been doing some bookkeeping, keeping the books for my husband's business for a few years, and when I decided to go back to college and finish up, accounting was a good direction, I thought, because I already had some experience in bookkeeping. And I was going after a job that I could earn money right away. When we were growing up there were just about three areas that girls were geared into: nursing, teaching, or being a housewife. My mother was a teacher, and no way! The pay is not good. The schedule is fine, but the money's not there.

With three children dependent on her, Sinclair found a way to secure a stable future for her family.

Michael has also worked all her adult life, part of it as a military nurse, and chose her career path early. But she is not sure being a tomboy was influential to her choice of being a nurse. Her career decisions were made long before Michael recognized that she was a tomboy at the age of 16:

I could certainly articulate when I was 16 that I was a tomboy. In terms of job choice, I'm not sure it significantly impacted. I can remember at four years old articulating what I was going to do. I wanted to be a surgeon. I knew health care was what I was going to do. When I was a candy striper

in Japan I finally saw that physicians handled things very differently from nurses. When they came around they would joke and everything, which felt good, but they were in and out. And I didn't want to be like that, that's not what I wanted to do. And I didn't like how they treated people, so my decision to become a nurse evolved at that time. I just changed after watching people in action.

She thought for a minute then said slowly, "I don't think I ever saw a female physician until later, when I was in the military."

Michael made a second career decision after watching the military system. She spoke of not having children, a decision she linked directly to her nursing career:

One of the reasons I decided not to have children, and this was a conscious decision in my late teens and early 20s, was because I think I realized where I was headed and I didn't want to pass it on. I was very adamant that I wasn't going to be stuck taking care of kids, with my husband gone 40-45 weeks a year. I'll be damned if I'll give up my job. In nursing, that's a big, big problem. The environment did NOT support your having a family.

Michael watched other nurses struggle with the sole responsibility of raising their children and continually fighting the military system and decided it was not a challenge she wanted to take on.

Annie chose the opposite course of action, leaving the beginnings of a career as a speech pathologist to have a family. "Raising my kids to be healthy

adults has been my most satisfying career," Annie reported, then added

and I still say tomboys make the best mothers! I taught my kids to swim, ride, play baseball, kick a soccer ball. We climbed trees, made tree forts, rode bikes all over, raced through orange groves on mopeds, whacked tennis balls as far as we could. Tried to teach them golf but I'd forgotten how to hold a club by then!

Growing up with brothers was also big help:

And having lots of male buddies has enabled me to understand and speak both male and female language, although I think I speak better male than female most the time. My own kids, and their friends, both genders, often tell me I'm easy to talk with, I talk like they do. That's probably from knowing two languages since childhood. And maybe never having completely grown up myself!

Annie had quite a few "minicareers along the way, all of them a little out of the ordinary," but nothing that took her too long away from family time. Annie believed that her current interest in working with women's groups and encouraging both women and adolescent girls to "maintain a sense of who they are and not get lost in a male-dominated world" certainly fits in with tomboy style:

Or maybe it's just that I understand the male style of language with its focus on competition, warrior mentality and win-at-all-costs mentality, and see what a mess the world is because of it. Women have many, many valuable strengths that need to be recognized and appreciated.

Sarah spoke of having "a brief career as a teacher" then, like Annie, put

most of her energies into a career as a mother:

I think you just continue the same interests, whatever they are. I always stressed outdoor activities, and both my kids are very independent thinkers and maybe that's from me. And I would raise them all over again the same way. That's who I am.

"We're probably the last generation of women who stayed home," Elizabeth said slowly. "We stayed home and raised our kids. Women don't have that luxury anymore. Well, we were probably sold a bill of goods!" We laughed and agreed that was probably true. "I thought about getting married. That was my career. I went through about five majors before I finally got into teaching. That's the only thing that was left! But the correlation to being a tomboy?" She stopped and thought for a few minutes before answering with wide hand motions to match her language. "It's just. . . doing things the same way, being interested in the same things." Elizabeth's interests in art and spirituality continued to grow throughout her life and combined easily with her child raising. Being a tomboy mom was for both Elizabeth and Sarah, "the only way to be."

Sue is convinced her entire career, indeed her entire life, has been strongly influenced by being a tomboy and having a tomboy sense of independence:

My whole career has been very colored by my being independent, and I think independence was really spawned by having been real competitive. I think of my career changes, and I have only been in two places, but any

time there was a conflict, I survived conflict a lot better than did a male counterpart that had a huge ego! The ego would not allow them--in a conflict, there had to be a winner and a loser. I don't think women in general, they can be competitive but there doesn't have to be a winner and a loser. You're really hoping for two winners. Girls as tomboys, or girls who have been tomboys, have a better chance of doing that in this life if they've been doing it all along in some way, shape or form.

Sue chose her career as a Chartered Financial Analyst because "I liked what I saw" when working in her first job at a mutual fund. She mentioned one of her early work experiences:

My big surprise [was when] I went out into the work force in 1969 from [the women's college]. The only recruiter that came to [my college] was TWA. That wasn't an era when you had a lot of recruiting anyway, but they were the only ones visibly there. I applied at Kaiser Industries, went to the HR department, someone had told me they had positions for management trainees. And I had the educational background and certainly the aptitude to do that.

Sue leaned forward in her chair and spoke more slowly and distinctly:

I went in and asked for the application and a man came into the waiting room and said he didn't think it made any sense for me to fill out the application because they didn't take women for these positions, because women had such a high rate of dropout. It was not economically feasible for them to do that. How fast did I type?

Sue laughed, then took a deep breath before her words began to pick up speed as she resumed her characteristic speech pattern:

The incredible part about that was not that he said it, but that my response was, 'Oh.' I handed him back the application, told him I didn't type, and left. But I didn't challenge him. Now today nobody would do that, of course. But it was part of my growing up to follow the rules, and that happened to be a rule. I accepted it, went to a temp agency, got a job at a mutual fund doing some flunky work and worked my way up for 11 years then came here. Got my M.B.A. in the process.

Sue's friends, meanwhile, did not have jobs and "weren't even applying. They were getting married." One of them urged Sue to get married so "you can have babies too and we can both be moms." Sue spread her hands in exasperation:

My gosh, she's got a college education! Years later she got a divorce and was very envious of my career. She had been very good at writing, had lots of skills and talents, and now she was very bitter and resentful and had to go to work as a secretary.

Sue was willing to follow the rules in hiring practices, but challenged the traditional role of women to focus on her own career interests. She returned to school for an M.B.A. when very few women were admitted to graduate programs, and talked about adhering to some cultural traditions while breaking out of others by making independent career choices that best fit her abilities and interests.

Fury also related that her being a tomboy had a direct effect on her decisions concerning her work:

Being a tomboy had a lot to do with my choice of career. I had to be a teacher. . . .At the time there weren't a lot of options, and where I went to school we didn't have a lot of chances to explore different careers. But the fact that I went on to University, went into a profession, speaks to the fact that I was a tomboy too.

Fury, like Sue, noted that all her friends were getting married, and that was definitely not a choice she wanted to make at that age. Where Fury currently lives, "There are very few women in administration in my area. Probably three or four out of 75. I think I've learned a pattern of being different," which Fury attributes to being a tomboy. Fury not only enjoys being different, but has learned a great deal from having challenging interactions within her male dominated profession. "I find new freedom," Fury added as she discussed being one of the few women--and probably the only tomboy--in an patriarchal environment. She paused as she reflected on her work and her determination to be true to who she is. "I need to be responsible to influence my behavior, even in the slightest way." This awareness of self, behavior and surroundings is something Fury believed is characteristic of how she has lived her life.

Fury has never backed off from her necessary challenges in her current administrative work:

I remember having to talk to a principal about his behavior, and he said nobody can be conscious of their behavior all the time. I said 'Yes they can!' I am totally aware of my body, my physiology, my different levels, and my impact. And there's enormous responsibility that comes with that.

Fury tries to influence and encourage coworkers to become more aware of their behavior and take responsibility for their actions.

These ten midlife tomboys chose different careers, from full time paid employment to full time parenting to a combination of each. Those who combined children with careers feel satisfied their choices have worked out well, and those who stopped out of work to raise their families share the same feelings of what was right for them. Most agreed that being a tomboy influenced their careers, with Michael not sure about the link between her career and being a tomboy since her career choices were made long before she was consciously aware of her tomboy nature. Many of these ten tomboys admitted they had not thought about the influences of being a tomboy on their career before, but as we talked in the interviews, it became clear to them that there was definitely a connection.

Whatever their reason for the tomboy influence, from an independent personal style, love of physical activity, ability to speak both traditional male and female languages, or feeling they understood the male point of view and competitive nature, they felt strongly there was a connective thread linking who they were as tomboys with what they chose to do in their lives up to this point.

One Foot In Each World: Balance

"I saw myself as having access, complete access,
to both male and female worlds, and the idea
was to move from one to another and choose
the best of what was available." (JB)

The tomboys in this study all felt they have walked with one foot in each world, but their ability to balance themselves between the worlds varies greatly, and the time spent in each world is different for each tomboy. This concept of walking in each world was brought up spontaneously by the women, who felt that they moved freely between the male and female worlds until adolescence, when the culture began sending messages from their homes, schools, churches, and communities that they were expected to change their tomboy ways and plant both feet firmly in the feminine world. Two tomboys ignored or refused the messages; others accepted their assignments grudgingly and waited until they were older before regaining their ability to balance in a way that they felt was right for them. The other eight tomboys reported they regret accepting, even partially, the subordinated roles and insist they will never do so again.

This balancing act is described in detail in this Relationship section of the findings because it resonates most strongly in tomboy relationships, but, as other themes discussed in this dissertation, balancing their female and male sides appears to be a basic tomboy challenge that weaves in and out of all the themes, with more threads appearing in the third and final section of Memorable Moments of Life Stages.

When these ten tomboys felt the restrictive cultural curtain descending, and they felt it at different times in their lives, they felt they had lost, as Fury said, "the best of both worlds." They were no longer encouraged, or even allowed, to walk with one foot in the traditional male world that stressed independence, outspokenness and goals of male-oriented business professions, but were

forcefully pushed into the uncomfortable world of a traditional female environment that encouraged domestic responsibilities, dependence on others for financial support with only a few approved careers such as teaching or nursing open to them. For all ten tomboys this was a devastating assignment. Many of them simply could not conform.

JB approached this subject with a positive outlook, "The idea was to learn everything that was available, both on the male side of the world and on the female side of the world, so you had access to the skills of both." JB believed this goal has been a lifelong pattern, and she continues to find herself going in nontraditional directions without any major discomfort:

In comparison to my women friends, I give myself more permission to make mistakes. And don't shame myself if I do. Part of that is training in music. I remember my music teacher saying, 'JB, if you're going to make a mistake, make a really BIG, LOUD one so everybody can hear it!' So that became my motto!

JB learned from her music teacher how to make a mistake, laugh about it, and move on. This attitude has contributed greatly to establishing balance in her life. JB's early years were remembered as trying to find what was right for her in an exceedingly male dominated home, and she took advantage of the opportunities as they presented themselves. Her college and graduate years tipped the balance from living in a male world to moving into a female world, where her friends and professional relationships, in modeling and dancing at the Tropicana in Las Vegas, were mostly female. This was her first opportunity to walk solidly

in a female-oriented world, and where she first learned the value of female friends. "We functioned as a family," she reported with a big smile. JB finally found sisters behind the stage lights, and learned the lessons she felt she had missed out on in earlier years. As JB moved into her professional career, she reported finding the desired balance, achieving a comfort level with both men and women and balancing her internal male and female sides.

The balancing challenges never seem to stop, but they do seem to change focus. Comfortable with walking in both worlds, JB is currently seeking balance of a different nature:

Right now, being at my midlife crisis, which is loads of fun, what are my options? Wow, this is great! It's how do I balance the musician and the artist in me, how do I incorporate that right now? And how do I pass on what I've learned? So these are the three areas I'm looking at. I WANT to learn how to balance. So I have the freedom to, because of the way I lived the first part of my life, to go ahead and conduct the other part.

Every once in awhile I'm at cross points in my life that tell me I've gotten to where I want to go.

JB referred to cross points as turning points in her life, which she understands much better with hindsight. Often a decision she made years before will be remembered at a later date. JB gave the example of visiting Southern California at the age of five, leaving behind the dry Nevada desert to stand on a rock at the La Jolla Cove. She loved the cool air and the spray of the waves drenching her to the skin. She immediately made the decision to live in La Jolla when she grew

up. Years later, when JB honored that early pledge to pursue her graduate work in San Diego, she realized she had reached one of her cross points. "When I came out here for graduate school I stood on the same rock and a huge wave came in and leveled me!" She threw back her head with a long laugh. "I got the message!" she added, "life is not an accident!"

JB looked back on her life as a continuous challenge of balancing her life between the male and female worlds, always deliberately choosing which arena will offer her the most productive results. She has earned a deep understanding of these concepts and discussed her balancing acts with enthusiasm.

Sue also walked in both worlds, and thought her love of competition has provided her the ability to balance her life. Although competition is certainly not limited to males, Sue grew up in an environment where she felt her love of all forms of competition, particularly academic competition and later in the male dominated work environment, was more encouraged for men than for women. Her professional relationships were managed well precisely because she speaks and understands the competitive language style of the work place. Sue did report a current situation that is calling for her to use her balancing strategies in a new format, however, that of learning to let go of her lifelong independent stance and build a strong interdependent relationship in her recent second marriage:

The remarriage part is very difficult when you've been fiercely independent and made all your own decisions. I was divorced for eight years, and I came [from an earlier] marriage where I'd also been very independent and made all my own decisions because he was gone so

much. So it's hard, then, to learn a joint effort on things. Learn interdependence. Not co-dependence, but interdependence.

Sue seemed aware that her ability to walk so smoothly in the male world will now require compromises that she has not faced before, but is eagerly exploring.

Sinclair has walked in both worlds, and vowed she will never return to the strictly prescribed female paths again. She had one extremely rocky stretch that began with her marriage in her third year of college, lasted eight years and produced three children. The marriage turned out to be a physically abusive situation she could not escape. "When he was around he was a great daddy, but there was the other part I never got out of." During this time she sought help from several male attorneys (she does not remember even knowing there were female attorneys to talk to) but, "I *never* got any help at that time to get out of it." Sinclair was quiet, then added, "I'm not sure I've ever gotten over that."

When Sinclair's husband was killed in an accident, she vowed she would never again allow herself to be forced into a submissive or uncontrollable situation. She returned to college to complete her degree, knowing she had to support her children. "I felt like I was starting over again, it really felt good to go back and start being a person."

She did try one more marriage, however. "I married eight years later for a couple years, and all of a sudden I realized it wasn't working out, so I didn't stay. I've been single every since and very happy with myself." Sinclair admitted, with a laugh, that it would be "nice to have some financial help, and some love and attention once in awhile!" But since she never felt she had "to have a man to

qualify myself," she works on balancing her life in her work and exercise outlets.

Sinclair is currently focused on her love of physical activity and how "I'd love to have more time to go out and play golf, or go hiking, or do what I want in the outdoors." She would also love to find a job working outdoors, and talks about it often with friends, but has not figured out how to accomplish that yet. Sinclair reported that her sense of walking in the world she has created is a positive style for her.

Fury's discussion of her experiences walking in both worlds began with a spiritual discussion about gender and relationships:

It's like I saw my mother and my sister being in the world, that feminine was a subservient feminine. It was almost divorced from the earth, because in my version, you are connected to all and all is equal. The old feminine, old to me, was with a very evolutionary limitation. But now the feminine needs to be honoring the earth to the max, and holding that space so that men can do the same, because they've lost sight of who they are in relation to the earth. We're more tied to the earth.

Fury then expanded her discussion with musings about other cultures. She wondered if, "in more primitive cultures, where women have been the matriarchs and shared equal responsibility within the tribe, they didn't have to have tomboys. Their version of feminine was broad enough", perhaps, to encompass both male and female sides of our personalities.

"I don't think it's ever a static balance," Fury said slowly, then added but I think my definition of masculine and feminine has worked. It's not

50-50, every situation varies with me. What's needed in the situation?

Absolute nurturing, gentleness, kindness? Or masculine, where you need to be in absolute control, decisive, taking charge? It depends on what the needs are at the time. My ideal would be. . .

Fury paused, thought a moment, then returned to a spiritual theme. "It goes through my core, my connectedness with the divine power, it's whatever is needed in the situation. And the energy becomes androgynous, really."

She spoke for a few minutes about having to continually straddle each world, the female and the male, searching for balance in both her personal and professional life. "I go in and out all the time, the inward, the outward, trying to be in integrity, but it becomes a challenge because there are so few other women around, so few men. . . I mean, we're truly on the edge of creating this new consciousness." Fury thought the future will allow more openness and ability for women to move more freely, and she is determined to continue her efforts to walk smoothly in both worlds. As with the other tomboys, the balancing journey seems to be ongoing with only an occasional bump in the road.

Annie's experiences of balancing both worlds included both the outer or physical world and the inner search, as Fury's does, but took more detours:

I loved the freedom we had as kids to be ourselves, both in classes and out in the fields playing sports. But when I was in college, although we had pretty well accepted the rules of girl behavior by then, we still preferred to interact with guys in their sports. Most girls wouldn't even join us. We could pass ourselves off as feminine if we had to, and practiced

with make-up and that stuff. We weren't confused about our orientation--straight as arrows and pretty darn traditional. But what we struggled with was how we could still be athletic and feminine at the same time.

This is a struggle that Annie faced until her thirties, when she "gave up the occasional attempts to be something I'm not. It always felt false, tipped too far to one side." Annie always was more comfortable in an open, competitive, male oriented environment although she believed she was able to walk in the traditional female world if there were not too many compromises attached, such as wearing fancy dresses and "acting like a lady--never did get comfortable with that." She admitted that there were "times in my life when I tried to act girly but only ended up feeling like a traitor to who I really was."

Sarah seemingly has not struggled with any balancing act of her own, and reported that she "just kept cruising" and doing what she was most comfortable with without stopping to think about two different cultural environments or requirements. She mentioned several relatives and neighbors whom she simply cannot relate to because they live in such a "frou-frou" world. Sarah does not remember trying to be anyone other than who she is, and said she has always been able to "play the game" without losing her sense of self. Her straightforward talk and determination to walk her own path, which wanders comfortably in and out of the traditional two worlds, was reinforced by her shrug of the shoulders and smiling comment, "What you see is what you get."

Conversation about walking between two worlds inspired an interesting memory for Elizabeth. She never bothered--and still does not--"with all that

make-up stuff" and thought she had maintained her independent nature most of her life. Grade school, however was a painful time. Elizabeth recalled feeling that she was "not quite accepted" during those early years. She preferred her male friends for friendships, but remembered loneliness from feeling the only one left out of the girls' world. "Then I talked to some of my friends from kindergarten, first grade, and they all felt the same way. Each one of them, to a woman, felt like she was the one person out. That's just amazing to me!" Elizabeth thought the balancing act between two worlds is not confined to tomboys, but is probably a typical challenge for many young girls.

Lynn tied her sense of balancing between the two worlds back into the strong physical nature of tomboys. "I just think we have some kind of equilibrium. We're not dieters, we're not bulimics, we're not anorexics, or anything." Lynn felt the security tomboys gain from confidence in the physical abilities has encouraged the ability to balance themselves. "At least for me," she added. Lynn then spoke of her experiences with other female trekkers, mentioning the discussions they have had not only about striving for balance in their physical activities, but the challenges of balancing scholarly pursuits with travel for research with families and friends. She made no mention of any particular struggles with balancing her interests after college, so perhaps she was able to keep close to her chosen path with few, if any, detours.

Sydney reported she negotiated her balance between the worlds quite comfortably until she reached college and faced a choice of majors without her usual support team. Being pushed into walking in the female-accepted paths of

certain choices of study, and receiving the male academic discouragement from areas in which she was interested, frustrated her immensely. Once out in the working world, however, her assurance and equilibrium took over. "I knew that I was capable, a bright person, people liked me, I picked up on things easily." She had her pick of employment. She walked for many years on a traditional male professional path "yet I was functioning as a female, I was very definitely a female. But someone who was thought of as being a person." Sydney's challenges came later, after her two children were born, which is discussed more thoroughly in the next section.

Michael, on the other hand, said she has spent far more time, most of her life, walking the male path and is now working on balancing male with female:

There's a nice medium, there's times when you need to be both, but I think you can be a balanced person. So in my later life I'm learning to be a balanced person. I feel like I'm learning in my 40s, but many women knew in their 20s because they got that balance early. I think I'm a better person now, I think I know how to do certain things better, but it's still so easy to slip back into that comfortable mold, because you feel secure there. I don't feel secure in the blend of male-female yet. But I still think getting in touch with my female side has made me a lot healthier. It's allowed me to get in touch with my spiritual side of my nature, which I always had but [it] kind of lay dormant for many years.

Growing up with a father in the military, then being a military nurse for eight years of her nursing career, may have helped to push Michael more solidly

onto the male path, but has presented many difficult situations:

My masculine demeanor has caused a lot of problems for me along the way. It was a harshness, and unwillingness to feel [others] feelings. I could hear them but I wouldn't feel them, because I wouldn't allow myself to feel. I could have saved myself a whole lot of problems along the way, as we all could, if I'd just thought about things a little more.

Michael thought the very feminine women need to learn how to balance, too.

"They don't know how to be assertive, don't know how to guide their lives in some way. Other types of women may be too assertive."

The balancing act, in Michael's thinking, is obviously not limited to tomboys. She talked about the need for balance not just for herself, and other females, but for the rest of our world:

If you look at leadership, and look at what they're talking about for the future, and I'm firmly committed to this, in terms of shared governance, they're talking about having the more feminine qualities, be willing to empathize, to listen, to work with, it's much more of a unifying thing vs this person sitting over you telling you what to do. I think society as a whole is going through this.

We explored this subject for a few moments, of walking two paths and trying to figure out which works best for each one of us and our tomboy tendency to feel comfortable with one foot in each world. Michael asked me how I balanced the worlds, and I told her I had a different family background from hers, but that many of the challenges were similar. Then Michael touched on the

critical psychological concept that everyone has a male and a female side to them that needs to be recognized and balanced. In a thoughtful tone she said

I guess the difference between you and some of the other tomboys when they were young is that, at a very early age, or at some point early on, you realized that there were two sides of yourself and you integrated. And some of us didn't. I think that some of us that couldn't integrate the male and the female have had a harder time. I think that's where a lot of our problems stem from not knowing we have all these sides to us, and that integrating makes you a better person.

Michael took a deep breath then chose her words carefully. "Don't you think that wisdom is really learning what you are and that you can't learn what you are until you learn all the different parts of you? And are somehow able to accept them?" We agreed this is not limited to tomboys or women. Michael said

it's an everybody issue. But it doesn't come without pain! Our life wisdom lets us know, but what we know may not be the same and if you live in a society that has o-n-e truth. . . I mean, that's what being a tomboy is all about, that o-n-e truth, and we didn't get it!

There was much laughing at this point, after which we decided that even though that o-n-e truth is dictated by a patriarchal culture, we tomboys really did get it. We had the benefit of walking in both worlds and choosing the best of both.

Indeed, for the ten tomboys in this study, walking with one foot in each world appeared to be a solidly consistent theme that is reflected in their discussions of relationships. The enduring ability of these tomboys to have

comfortable male as well as female friendships, and to pursue activities that were, in the cultural atmosphere of their early years, considered unladylike or unfeminine, remains a source of pride to them. Nine out of the ten tomboys speak highly of their family support and positive father or older brother influences, which they feel enabled them to understand the competitive environment far better, both in school and career situations. The remaining tomboy seems to have achieved this balance in spite of negative male influences in her early life, which leads me back to Lynn's belief that being a tomboy is "hard-wired" and if not squelched, will seek its own balance.

In relationships with other women, there seemed to have been a clear preference for athletically active females in the tomboy friendship circles. The derogatory names many tomboys had as youngsters for the "ultra-feminine" girls began early in life and, for many, continue to this day. Most of the tomboys in this study simply cannot resonate with traditional feminine traits. Only now, with their current midlife maturity, have these tomboys begun to recognize and honor the choices other women have made in their lives.

Walking with one foot in each world no longer seems attached to a cultural imperative in the minds of these participants. It no longer means that one world is good or one is bad, or that one is acceptable or one is not acceptable, it only reflects individual preferences. For these ten tomboys, the preference is almost not even a choice. They seem to intuitively blend the two worlds, and think of themselves as unique and as having an advantage over other women with their ability to balance the dual attributes of their personalities.

Memorable Moments in Life Stages

Everyone has memorable moments in their lives when they realize, either at the time or with the clarity of hindsight, that a specific event or experience has made a deep and lasting impression. Sometimes these experiences are powerful enough to change the course of lives, other times they may cause a shift in thinking or patterns of behavior. For the purpose of examining the memorable moments in the lives of the tomboys in this study, the analysis has been grouped into four life stages: Pre-Adolescence, Adolescence, Early Adulthood and Midlife.

The first life stage, Pre-Adolescence, is remembered by all ten tomboys as a memorable time being carefree, light-hearted, and in a very physically active time of their lives. They spent most their time outdoors with both male and female playmates (often preferring male friends) engaging in every creative and physical activity they could find. They felt their physical skills were usually "better than the boys" and were proud of their achievements. Each tomboy remembers her freedom with the words "Nobody said I couldn't," which they interpreted as permission to be themselves. These pre-adolescent tomboy voices clearly reflected a solid sense of self and strong independent feeling of being in full control of their lives and choices.

The second stage, Adolescence, is considered to be a difficult and challenging time for most young people, and it certainly was for these tomboys. In the case of these ten tomboys, memories of adolescence range from having no problems to remembering a time of confusion or even occasional depression.

Adolescence was the time when the positive messages allowing, or even urging, these young girls to act naturally began to turn into restrictive admonitions. Instead of continuing to receive solid support and encouragement for their physical activities and competitive natures, they began to get the advice to "Stop running around so much," "Act like a lady," "Sit down and cross your legs," "Make yourself attractive so boys will like you," and "Take Home Economics, you'll need it." Suddenly, with the onset of a pubescent body and registration in junior high school, almost everyone, from peers to parents to teachers, began sending a physically limiting message.

The reaction among these tomboys was varied. Three tomboys felt they "bought in" to the restrictions with a tempered acceptance and a "maverick streak lurking under the surface." Five of the tomboys remember responding to the restricted roles with rebellion, and the other two simply ignored the messages and went on with their lives in the only manner they knew. There was quite a bit of differentiation in the tomboy adolescent voices as these girls moved from having strong, independent, and confident voices to having a murky, bewildered, or confused sense of self during specific times of their adolescence.

These tomboys lived in a time when the wearing of pants was not acceptable female attire in school, religious or social situations. Every tomboy mentioned the enforcement of the "now you must wear dresses" rule as a critical and demoralizing experience. The rule made no sense to them and it inspired instant rebellion, first in adolescence and continuing to this day.

The life stage of Early Adulthood is the traditional time for young people to

pair off into serious relationships and settle down in marriage, a time that inspired many memorable moments. All ten tomboys in this study have experienced marriages, with seven currently married, one divorced, one widowed and divorced, and one widowed. This was the period when five tomboys report they were in the "most traditional feminine roles" of their lives, when they willingly accepted a traditional dependent position within the marital relationship. During their late 20s and 30s, however, these five tomboys began to regain the strengths they had experienced as children and realized what they had lost. The question, "Why am I trying to be someone else?" began to percolate in their minds. They began to become re-acquainted with their inner, more independent styles and reclaimed their former strong sense of self.

Although these tomboys accepted the cultural expectations that they felt were unfair or restricting, they only lost their sense of who they were for a relatively short period of time. They moved through such experiences and regained their sense of self with even more determination not to lose themselves again. As one of them said, "I'll do it if I have to, but it's a stupid rule, and this doesn't fit who I am or how I want to live." In this group, five voices report being independent and five as dependent during their early adulthood stage.

The stage of life known as Midlife is well known as a major adjustment period and is often referred to as "Midlife Crisis." For these ten tomboys midlife has many memorable moments, but not a single tomboy reported it to be a crisis in any way and only one tomboy feels she is still fine-tuning a major adjustment period. All comments were enthusiastic and upbeat. Each tomboy offered a

picture of being released from the contradictions they felt the culture had imposed on them as they walked both paths in the first half of their lives. The midlife women reported a freedom to express themselves naturally, and felt more accepted for their individual personalities. Midlife is the memorable time when these tomboys regained their clear, strong, authentic voices. Although there is a poignancy attached to memories of having temporarily lost their sense of self, it is tempered with a pride that they are back to being fully themselves again.

Pre-Adolescence

"I always knew what I wanted to do, where I was headed,
there was no question. I just went for it. There was
nobody to say I couldn't do this." (Michael)

All ten tomboys echoed the same strong, independent voice, a voice projecting strength and confidence in who they were as individuals. None of these women was discouraged from any activity or interest during the early years of their lives, and they cherish that memory of freedom from restrictions. Although this may not seem unusual in the current environment that encourages young girls to play sports, it was unusual to them. These tomboy women reported that many of their female peers were receiving stern messages to "act like a lady," "sit quietly with your legs crossed," and to focus on indoor domestic pursuits such as cooking and sewing. The tomboys felt fortunate not to have been bombarded with these restrictive rules during their childhood years. They were free to be outside careening around the neighborhoods on bikes or horses

or skates, challenging boys to sandlot baseball games of "work-up" or playing "capture the flag" after dark on long summer evenings.

Just as Michael "grew up thinking I could do anything, thinking I was the equal of everyone" so did the rest of these participants. Sinclair does not remember any negative messages. In fact, she stated she never even thought that she was not acting in a traditional "feminine" manner, she just went outside and did what she wanted.

Sydney agreed that no one ever told her not to climb trees or pursue physical sports "because it's not feminine." She had, throughout her childhood, "a strong sense of just being a person, an individual." She was always encouraged to do whatever she wanted and was free to select her activities, school course work, and friends without any interference or negative messages. The common expressions she remembers from parents, teachers and guidance counselors echoed the same refrain, "Go for it! Do what you want to do!"

Sue's messages in pre-adolescence were also open and accepting, but her activities did not center on the boys sports as much as the other tomboys in this study. "I was not particularly athletic," she claimed, which she defined as not engaging in football and baseball with the boys. Her riding adventures, however, certainly indicated a high level of physical ability, and her "preferred activities were clearly outdoors."

"Do your best!" was the expression Lynn remembers most. And "You're smart, go for it!" There were no negative messages in her childhood, and she treasures the opportunities her family gave her to participate in the same pursuits

as her brothers. They did all activities as a united family, which she feels was extremely supportive and nurturing. She also found her participation in the Girl Scouts to be a wonderful, free, physical exploration time.

"I don't want you to be some rich man's toy!" was the primary directive JB received from her mother, which only encouraged her to spend more time in her sports activities. "You make the choices, we'll back you up" is what Annie remembers most of her early years, along with her unwillingness to be indoors when there were "trees to climb, horses to ride, bugs to catch, games to play."

Sarah, Elizabeth and Fury did not mention any negative messages during their childhood years, and they seemed to have been free to pursue their own interests. These tomboys felt that the long childhood period of receiving steady and positive encouragement to be themselves, allowed to act in a natural, comfortable and independent manner, left a powerful and lasting impression.

Adolescence

"When you go into adolescence, it's almost
like you have to give up something
to become a girl." (Sinclair)

For Sinclair, as well as the other tomboys, adolescence meant giving up many of her independent tomboys ways and having to accept a narrowing of opportunities. Sinclair remembers, "Now that I look back on it, it was really quite a change. I was definitely a tomboy-type person growing up, but in high school we changed. It was almost like you had to grow up real quick." Sinclair didn't seem upset about the changes, but she definitely remembers them clearly.

Annie and Fury, however, recalled that for them adolescence was a particularly rough road with many painful moments. As Annie said

my journey into adolescence is kind of a blur to me, maybe because I've blocked it out. Living in a small town, I never gave my free-wheeling lifestyle a thought. In junior high, though, I remember walking the halls feeling miserable. I hated the clothes, I hated the rules. One boy called me a 'country bumpkin' and I almost punched him, but I guess somehow I knew my feisty days were over.

As with other tomboys reminiscing about their teen years, some parts of Annie's experiences were positive, and some were negative, although the primary memorable moments were negative. "I was great in gym and English and Spanish, hated math, and spent most the time out of school with a book or on my horse." Annie recalled preferring to read her brother's adventure stories, or "riding my horse a lot, often alone, and somehow muddling through." Annie felt the walls were closing in on her:

Although I loved who I was on the inside, and didn't want to change, I literally felt claustrophobic sometimes, and still do, although it's rare now. And lonely, terribly lonely. I developed an inferiority complex that lasted for many years, although few people recognized it.

A local private girl's high school, chosen by Annie's parents, offered her two years to rediscover who she was. "Most of the other girls were lonely too, shipped off to a boarding school, but most of them were tomboys. We had a ball!" They were able to participate in all sports, and they accepted and

supported one another. "My grades really took off," Annie recalls, "and the atmosphere was so supportive we were all able to get into good colleges." Although she was offered admission to Scripps College, the financial obligations were too steep for the family, so Annie attended a local state university. "Those two years in [high] school were a more powerful and positive influence than I'd realized until years later, and I'm really grateful to my parents for making that decision for me." Those girl's school years remain a highlight of the few positive memorable moments in Annie's adolescence, which she summed up by saying, "I just remember the early time as really awful, lonely, sad. I just felt lost. Frankly, it was a bitch."

Fury agreed with Annie that adolescence had some very painful moments:

[I felt] totally narrowed. Totally. Narrowed and then trapped. It was a total narrowing, a totally restricting time. It was very much a bad time and it still haunts me. There are times when it still rears its ugly head and I get [overly] concerned about how I appear, and how I sound. Am I too aggressive? Am I too loud? Adolescence was a real critical time when I started doing an act. I started pretending and I still do that. I don't have the confidence to say to hell with it.

Adolescence for Fury had some redeeming features, however, and she remembered the ability to stay true to herself deep inside. "Tomboys do their own thing early, really early," she said. "And you may lose it in adolescence, but I still did not lose my determination to honor who I was and to honor other people

at the same time." Fury added with a shrug of her shoulders, "it wasn't without a major amount of pain, too, just reining yourself in, like putting yourself in a mummy [wrap] for awhile."

JB described adolescence as partly the painful time that Annie and Fury mentioned, but also as a time of taking quiet moments to assess who she was and what were her future directions. She felt "depressed and withdrawn" for awhile, when "the only thing I did was continue my fencing. And I got involved in physical activities, and I read a lot. Hemingway, Steinbeck. Probably the most important to me was my reading." When I commented that she only mentioned male authors, JB responded

you've got to remember, the female models I had around weren't that good. Wives, daughters, and God knows they were treated like shit. We had sugar-girls down on the strip, we had hookers, we had some nuns. Schoolteachers. And the Mormon women who were just reproductive machines. I learned very easily to shift the identity from the primary male character, which probably most women did. So I picked out what I needed to go on.

In contrast to the tomboys who reported difficult adolescent times, Sue cheerfully announced that "my adolescence was comparatively painless!" She felt the fact that she was a firstborn, and grew up in a household where "the parenting style was really strict, particularly for the first one" had a strong impact. "I think the boundaries expand with the second and third, but the boundaries on the first one are pretty tight. And I never questioned it." Sue's mother apparently

attributes Sue's "painless" adolescence to her being involved with horses, keeping her "on the straight and narrow and very focused." Sue agreed that having her horse and competing in horse shows kept her adolescence more pain-free than it was for others. That and her ability to retain her independence are the reasons Sue feels she had "an easy adolescence."

Sydney's early teen years resembled Sue's painless time. Sydney remembers accepting some restrictions but very few, and certainly not the intellectual ones. "I went along with some things considered female and yet I pushed the edge of it and said, 'I'm not going to be thought of as some DUMB little female.'" Sydney flourished all four years in high school. "I felt in control of myself, really having a ball."

The troubled times came in late adolescence for Sydney, and focused on her decisions about what to do in her life rather than personal difficulties. After her first one-and-a-half years in a women's college she'd somehow "gotten it into my head that this [women's college] wasn't the real world. Maybe this was watered down" so she transferred to a large university. In the coeducational school she and her friends

managed to get around the rules, we didn't make waves about it. We went along, we bought being a female at a certain point, but I certainly didn't buy into saying I was less equal, or less capable of learning or doing what I wanted.

After a thoughtful pause, Sydney added, "I bought the outward, at least what society says you do, to a certain point. But not on the inside."

It was towards the end of her college program that Sydney encountered a complete lack of encouragement and began getting the lowest grades of her life. She was "kind of floundering around. I knew I had the capability and the intellect to be strong and do well. But I didn't do that well." This as clearly a memorable--and negative--moment for Sydney, whose words came out strong and tinged with anger. "I still knew I had a decent mind, that I could do what I wanted there, but I was thoroughly entrenched with the idea, you gotta do this, you gotta do that."

Sydney took a long, deep breath as if to illustrate her memories as she said, "I just felt kind of under, like I couldn't breathe. I was struggling. And now I realize, why didn't I stay in that girl's school? I had the opportunity of a lifetime and I got out!"

Sarah had what she described as a mildly "tough time. Confusion about who you are, trying to like things you really don't. I think my adolescence stretched out longer than most." We then embarked on a discussion of just how long adolescence lasts, with no answers except that we had read that some people feel adolescence is defined by being financially dependent on one's parents. "Oh no," Sarah groaned, "my kids will be adolescents forever!" Our laughter completely ended this adolescent discussion.

Elizabeth felt that "It's a natural time of confusion for everyone" without elaborating, then waved her hand as if to banish the subject into thin air.

Lynn, however, was quite thoughtful and articulate on the subject:

Adolescence is where I think most women would say they were squelched. And that is become it starts to become, to both girls and their

parents, extremely important that they be socially acceptable. The cultural pressure is so intense! So many opportunities were closing. Lynn remembers being thoroughly squelched, for the first time, at the age of 13, a painful memory she often shares with her undergraduate students. When her family went on a vacation to the Grand Tetons, and her brother was allowed to take the mountain climbing classes but she was not, she felt a "strong sense of injustice, and there was one reason only. It wasn't because I was too young, because girls mature faster, we were very close in height and weight at that stage. It was simply because I was a GIRL!" Lynn was crushed, and realized for the first time that her gender could now restrict some of her activities.

This appears to have been Lynn's only deeply negative memorable moment until college. Lynn remembers her high school years as having virtually no restrictions:

We went to a private high school, a very good high school--this was in the late 50s and early 60s--that was incredibly progressive in that the boys had to take Home Ec one semester, then they took shop. [The girls had the same rotating schedule.] So I went to a high school that in many ways did very interesting things for the female and male students.

There were, however, in keeping with the times, no intramural sports for girls. "Nothing," Lynn stated emphatically. "Nothing for young women. We could be cheerleaders. Which I rejected!" she added, laughing. Although that was the only outlet for athletic girls, Lynn refused to cheer for others. "Why be on the sidelines, cheering? I just didn't like it!" Like seven other tomboys in this

study, Lynn chose not to cheer for others and preferred to find her sports activities outside of school with skiing and skating in the winter, and a myriad of outdoor activities in the summer months.

College was the next big squelching time for Lynn, and, like being refused permission to take a mountain climbing class, she was again discriminated against because of her gender. "I would say college was a terrible time for women, and the college I went to has an atrocious, an absolutely atrocious record." Lynn, who attended a small private college in Oregon, particularly rebelled at being referred to as "mediocre" just because she was female. "To look at the fact that women are coming in with equal degrees and equal S.A.T. scores--equal or higher--their attitude was [women] can't really make it here. They're all going to be wives and mothers anyway, so why bother?"

Lynn experienced being the best student in one class, then having the professor accuse her of cheating, which was a particularly deep blow to her. "That was the dilemma--you did well in class, you were accused of cheating. You didn't do well--you had a typical women's record, mediocre. That was the message of that college." Lynn summed up her experiences, "It was that period to me that was a terrible period for women. I think I probably would have been much better off at a women's school, rather than coed."

Michael spoke of her adolescent years being spent mostly with her male friends. "My best friend was a boy. And it was very interesting because he was very effeminate and I was very masculine, maybe that's why we got along together." She did not speak of adolescence as a particularly traumatic time,

probably because "I didn't deal with it on the conscious level that I think about things now." Michael is the only tomboy who mentions playing football, but rebelled at the term "powderpuff football" and remembered being laughed at by the male football players (their coaches) if they executed a play wrong.

Being a young adolescent girl in the 1950s meant living with the cultural requirement to wear clothes that reflected your gender, which meant giving up pants and having movement restricted by having to wear dresses and skirts. This was the most memorable and intolerable aspect of reaching adolescence for seven of these midlife tomboys. Although they complied, they fumed inside and "there wasn't a day go by that I thought about how I really wish that I had pants on instead of a skirt," as Fury reported. Just sitting with her legs together was a real struggle, and taking a bus to school at 30 degrees below zero, wearing a skirt, is a memory that caused Fury to shudder.

Michael likened the required change in attire in her 6th grade to the first time she realized that, "a skirt became important. I think that for me that's what really made me start seeing that women are really different from men. You were segregated."

"With an older brother just a little bigger than I was," Annie remembered, "I always snuck into his closet. Tee shirts, jackets, flannel shirts, baggy jeans. I had to cinch the waist up to keep from losing [jeans] but I loved the freedom." Annie was forced into skirts in junior high school, and was one of the tomboys who felt she "bought in big time" to the rules.

"I'm not going to wear a dress again!" Sinclair flatly declared, pointing to

her shorts and tee shirt. She followed the rules in high school, however, and remembers shortening her skirts to keep up with the fashion trends. "We went along to dress like everybody else," Sinclair said, "but I just know it felt so-o-o-o good to come home and put jeans on." Once Sinclair reached college, however, she had a happy surprise. She arrived on campus the year the dress code loosened for girls, and her first reaction was, "Wow! I'm free!"

Sarah would much rather buy boys' clothes, from childhood to this day. "I didn't have any dresses for a long time. I went to school in a one-piece snowsuit and I had to keep it on all day because I didn't have a dress on underneath!" She laughed about how hot she would get, and how the principal of her school begged her father to buy her some appropriate girls' clothes.

"The prohibition that would not allow women to wear pants to school," Lynn announced indignantly, "was the law. You couldn't climb in a dress!" Nor could you do any other physical activities, she remembered. Today she simply refuses and dresses according to her own taste, sometimes in denim skirts, many times in pants.

"I'd much rather be in blue jeans," Sydney said, referring to both her earlier years and now, which seems to sum up the predominant opinion of the tomboys in this study.

All ten tomboys felt that had to "give up something to become a girl," as Sinclair said. Lynn's comments about the powerful cultural pressures to conform, and the closing of opportunities, seem to be the most descriptive. The memories of adolescent years seemed to stir up intense emotions for many of

these women, especially those with particularly painful memories. Single sex schools were positive experiences for Annie in high school and Sue and Sydney in a women's college. The lack of sports opportunities were certainly regretted. A confusion about how much feminine style to "buy into," as both Lynn and Sydney discussed, appears to have been a particularly difficult challenge for these tomboys who had never experienced restrictions before adolescence.

Memories of the lack of competitive sports, enforced dress codes, cultural admonitions to act in a ladylike manner, and the prevailing academic attitude that women were mediocre students, are scars carried deep within these tomboys today. It is obvious that these tomboys felt they indeed gave up a great deal to become girls.

Early Adulthood

"I liked what I was doing, and I
knew it was important. Until
that chaffing. . ." (Sydney)

Sydney, who cruised through childhood and most of adolescence with little travail or trauma, found herself vacillating between feeling confident and feeling compromised in her early adulthood years. During her 30s she had times when she was chaffing, frustrated by having no identity other than her role as wife and mother, yet she immensely enjoyed the challenges of rearing healthy young sons. "I was a housewife, " she remembered, and feeling like something was missing, yet not knowing what it was. "I just wanted to get into something that interested me." For the next few years Sydney's independent streak

seemed to be locked out of reach, and although she continued with computer classes, and worked on special projects, she wavered between enjoying the freedom to raise her children and being aware that she was living a dependent role that was not challenging her natural talents. For her, the years of self-doubt lasted about a decade.

Fury went through a period of self-doubt and questioning herself when she reached administrative status in her school system only to find herself working primarily with men. "I gained about 30 pounds," she reported with a grimace

and I started acting like a man. I wouldn't make eye contact, I was much less verbal, I played the political games in that I was secretive. I didn't go into power, but I went into status quo. Pretty much my energy just cycled right down. That's when I decided I was dying. I'd died.

When I asked what had died, Fury answered, "My soul, my hope, my will to make a difference, my joy, my sense of being unique. I just gave up." Fury even started feeling suicidal. "I was dead, literally, psychologically, so I figured I might as well be physically too." But it was through her body that she began to get back her spirit and sense of life. After Fury divorced, moved to another area, and began a demanding doctoral program her life began to come under control once again. For Fury, these were the most memorable--and desperate--moments of her early adulthood.

Michael's early adulthood was a time of revelations and the discovery of the anger she carried:

It seemed almost overnight we were not taken seriously by men and were somehow ostracized from life as we wanted it to be. It was more infuriating and exasperating at work where physicians were treated as some kind of god. I was relegated to night shift in my first place of work for not standing and offering my seat when the doctors came into the nursing station!

It was not only work situations that angered Michael's sensibility. She also received powerful messages from family members trying to force her into her gender role. Her mother-in-law "was furious when she found out I did not iron my husband's clothes. No amount of explaining would help." Even though Michael was supporting her husband during his school years by working full-time, as well as getting her Master's degree, she was still peppered by forceful messages from the family. After a period of intense reading and study, however, Michael's sense of self slowly returned:

It was during this time that I realized I had another way of knowing with a different sense of logic than male logic. I spent many hours talking with other female friends about how we felt devalued. We all handled it in different ways but that support system was invaluable. The goals of the women's movement finally started to make sense.

Annie also came late to the women's movement concepts, although she feels her responsibilities to her family to be a primary source of satisfaction in her early adulthood years. "I bought into the dependent role completely," Annie reported, "then had an identity crisis" when her children were applying to

colleges. She remembers the pain of "feeling like a parasite" and the determination to "get my act own together." Like Fury, Annie chose a return to school as her coming-out party, and liked it because she "was no longer known as anyone's wife, or anyone's mom--I was known for my own abilities." The sense of owning herself and regaining a measure of independence had returned to Annie's life by her early 40s.

Sinclair, as mentioned earlier, had her difficulties and dependent years during her early 20s with a particularly rough marriage, but burst out of that phase while still in her late 20s. Like the other tomboys, Sinclair has never lost that independent sense of self again.

For Sue, the word "dependent" does not appear to be in her vocabulary of life memories, for she has broken many of the cultural stereotypes since her childhood and still enjoys stretching the boundaries of expectations for women. Sue strikes me as having a remarkable ability to balance her home life with her career, with as much pride in her launching her daughters as her ability to create new organizations for women to professionally network. Perhaps, as she indicated, it was because in her early adulthood years she was married to a man who travelled a great deal, and her usual independent style never had to be challenged or compromised. Sue did not report a "dependent" stage at any time that she can remember.

There was not a specific time period labeled "early adulthood" in the four original questions of the interviews. The six tomboys above volunteered information about this time, but four did not. Neither Sarah nor Elizabeth spoke

about the early adulthood period as being anything out of the ordinary cultural expectations to "get married, have kids, buy your first house" cycle. They each have walked on both the dependent and independent sides of their roads with ease. Both Elizabeth and Sarah resonated strongly with several other tomboys in taking their job as mothers very seriously and as having a great deal of satisfaction that they each "did the best I could." The early adulthood years seemed quite traditional for these women.

Lynn and JB were the other two tomboys who discussed virtually nothing about this time, but I had the impression their experiences seemed to be focused less on traditional expectations and more on their professional activities.

Midlife

I think most women who were tomboys seem to do
better in midlife, aren't so threatened by it, and
seem to enjoy it. I think we keep re-defining
ourselves all the time." (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth spoke strongly about what she considers to be tomboy assets of a natural independence and self-awareness strength "that makes midlife so much better [for tomboys] than it is for the very feminine woman who looks in the mirror and has lost all of what was her claim to fame."

Midlife is a time when many women, tomboys or not, begin to feel freed from cultural restrictions once again, and these tomboys are particularly vocal about their joy of being in midlife. All ten of them seem to be doing just fine in their midlives, enjoying it and not threatened by it, as Elizabeth mentioned. In

fact, judging by their enthusiasm, the laughter, and the expansive arm movements that accompanied their words, this midlife period is clearly an energetic and positive time for them.

The process of self selection of these participants may have reflected their willingness to participate because they were in a positive place in their lives. A midlife tomboy who was experiencing difficulties or negative situations may not have been as enthusiastic about her current status.

Perhaps the most striking memorable accomplishment for these tomboys, however, is that they all report returning to a determination to be themselves. Often, with arms spread wide, the words were emphatic. "What you see is what you get."

"I'm just me," Fury said firmly. "I'm not going to change." Fury reported. she feels a responsibility to others to remain true to herself, true to "my tomboy nature," although she finds relationships are sometimes difficult to establish with men her age because they still want to put her into little behavioral boxes that fit their cultural expectations, not hers. "I'm just me," she repeated. "I want to be liked for who I am." Fury thought for a moment. "Midlife and adolescence all blends, interestingly, because I'm still working on the same things!"

"This is where it is, folks," said Michael in her calm manner. Yet she remembered a memorable time that pushed her onto her current search for her sense self. Her father was dying, she was working and going to school, and feeling overwhelmed with her responsibilities and losing her last parent. "I can remember feeling so trapped, not knowing where to go, and what's sad is the

roots are so obvious and I couldn't see them because I was so trapped."

Michael's soft voice and long pauses punctuated the painful memories.

Michael has learned many valuable lessons, and relished the freedom of finally understanding she is only responsible for her own behavior. This is "not an easy lesson" in the nursing field when one is "expected to be everything to everyone." Whether others approve or disapprove of how she acts is their learning path, not hers. She is busy working on uniting the male and female sides of her personality. This work "doesn't come without pain," Michael stressed. But the result is joyful. "I believe I [am] proud of being a woman for the first time. It finally hit home that I really did not want to be a man. It was a relief, invigorating, and thought provoking. It was WONDERFUL!" Michael's most memorable experience is allowing her to reclaim the feminine in herself and make choices that fit who she is and what is currently going on in her life. She can easily walk away from activities that compromise her sense of self. She felt she "understands how to deal with life more effectively" and has a "stronger sense of myself and my beliefs." Michael reported she is "much more open to other ways of being and knowing, more distrustful of common social wisdom."

Annie admitted her fiftieth birthday was a memorable shock, but she recovered quickly. She echoed the sentiments of "what you see is what you get" and is currently

having a wonderful time. It's the most comfortable place I've been in a long time. The difference is I don't have to care about that feminine stuff anymore, I can be myself. After turning 50 I slowly grew back into my own

skin, the one I'd hidden for so long. Now that funny-looking, free-wheeling, feisty little kid is free to come out and play for good. It's like a dear friend coming back to live permanently. We're home.

JB had the same attitude of returning to a comfortable place. "I'm back to being an absolute rascal and acting out! I've gone back to being my normal self again." JB has always been a prankster, loving to stir up a quiet pot with some spice and hot peppers, "which I'm really having fun with." She laughed, then became thoughtful, speaking in a quiet, measured cadence about a memorable midlife awareness:

Being real pretty can be a real handicap. And if you've bought in on it, you've probably lost your soul. It [being beautiful] gave me a really good view about what the feminine experience was, as well as other experiences. I know that people try to get ahold of women as trophies, and how they try to dehumanize you. They don't know what to do with you as a person, and you don't want to let that happen. That's scary! As I get older I move with more freedom through society and with fewer people watching me. When you are beautiful people are watching you all the time. It drives you crazy. When you get older, and the lines are there. People start ignoring you and it's more peaceful.

For JB, midlife is a time to enjoy freedom from cultural pressures and a time to indulge her playful self that has hidden inside--but barely hidden--for many years.

Lynn shared the same freedom but looked at it from another angle. "Take me or leave me, I am not going to defer," Lynn said, echoing the sentiments of

other tomboys that she is truly her own person. Midlife is a time for her to resist changing her personality to fit a cultural idea of how a woman should act. This does not imply a rigidity in her relationships, however, but a desire for balanced relationships. She spoke of not ruling out another marriage, although an intimate relationship would have to be based on a partnership model with equal sharing of tasks. "I'm not going to defer," she reiterated. "I'm not doing to be wifey-wifey and do all the dishes. I have my own interests and my own career. But we can work something out together, if [he's] willing to help." Lynn, like many women in late 40s (and probably not only tomboys) now would enjoy a shared model of relationship, with compromises on home activities but not personalities.

Lynn was also upbeat and excited about her life at this time. "Midlife is the time when everything positive about it really flourishes. Life gets better! This time of my life is so much fun. So many issues are solved. It's back to feeling more comfortable." Lynn leaned back in her chair, grinned broadly and spread her arms wide in her natural *joie de vivre* style. "It's just tremendous fun!"

Sarah echoed these sentiments, and had no trouble showing others this resolve by her quiet determination to be herself and her soft-spoken way of simply doing what she believes is best for her. "I think we have the freedom to really be ourselves now and not care. It's a no-nonsense thing." Sarah's midlife challenges have touched her mainly through family concerns. Her husband had a life-threatening accident several years ago, and they deliberately changed their lifestyle when he recovered to add travel and relaxation and fun to their lives. They have hiked and biked through many areas of Europe, and are currently

exploring Yosemite and other western national parks. "I think this might be the best stage," Sarah mused. "I mean, it's only going to get worse!"

Sydney recalled many memorable moments in her midlife of realizing she did not have to "do" something to have an identity, and she is quite comfortable now with having regained a strong sense of self. Sydney has kept a deep sense of curiosity and is eager to take on any future challenges, although "I haven't come to grips yet" with what those challenges will be. She speaks fondly of the long, strong line of women in her family, and how she now prizes her heritage and values women more now than at any time in the past.

Sinclair's determination to live her life by her own rules are firmly in place, almost as if she reached her midlife freedom many years ahead of the rest of the tomboys. Her job, the clothes she wears, and the southern drawl that softens her strong message to be herself point to a woman who is determined to remain true to both her nature and her interests.

Sue continues to be true to her nature, enjoying both her personal and professional activities, but with a memorable challenge of blending her strong sense of independence, which has served her well for all her life, with a new marriage and her desire to develop interdependence in this relationship. Blending four children into the new home, and continuing her demanding but rewarding work schedule, leave Sue little time to ponder any deep sense-of-self issues. "Maybe later, when things slow down!" she said with a laugh.

There is a particularly strong thread of "This is who I am--take it or leave it" woven through the tapestries of these women's lives, accompanied by an

attitude of refusing to change just to accommodate what others think their behavior should be. For the five women who felt they lost their independence for a period of time, there is particular joy in reclaiming the youthful feelings of being true to themselves rather than acquiescing to artificial restrictions.

Memorable moments in midlife are varied, as are the experiences that brought each tomboy to this stage. But these voices blend in a harmonious chorus that celebrates their willingness to tell the world they are independent, strong women, walking proudly with one foot in each world and living their own truths with strong, authentic midlife voices.

The last question of the interview was a spontaneous one which I asked the first participant then asked each of the others, "If you were able to do it over again, would you still choose to be a tomboy?"

Their answers were immediate, enthusiastic, and loud. Many times an arm was flung wide, a grin spread across their faces, and they laughed through their positive responses. Often they spent several more minutes sharing additional stories of the funny adventures. They blended their voices in perfect harmony as they answered, "Absolutely. Absolutely, without question. It's an interesting life, and I wouldn't do it any other way."

Conclusion

The lives of these ten tomboys are remarkably similar, with shared feelings about their high physical energy, love of competition, willingness to challenge social norms for most of their adult lives, and an unbridled enthusiasm about sharing their life stories. Nine of the ten came from families with strong

father or older brother figures; the other tomboy shared many of the same tomboy adventures and opinions and feelings although her family memories are more negative. All tomboys report strong, confident voices throughout their childhoods.

The tomboys chose friends among their peers by testing their willingness to share athletic interests, which led them onto many playing fields with boys. In early years they were usually included because their athletic ability outshone the boys of their age. By high school they were segregated or eliminated from athletic competition, a memory that continues to rankle many of these tomboys. Their female friends also shared an open humor, a willingness to make fun of the "ultra" feminine girls, and their rebellion of cultural dress codes.

These women reported that being a tomboy has had a positive and powerful impact on all the decisions they have made, in work, relationships, partners, raising children, choosing friendships. They appear to have strong communication skills, and because they have walked in both worlds, they seem quite comfortable talking "both languages." They base this ability on their understanding of (and participation in) the male competitive model of behavior with the win-lose language and attitudes.

The surprises (to me) were the unanimous responses that all tomboys refused to ever "dummy down" in physical or intellectual environments and remain indignant at the mere mention of it; their strong, unquenched love of competition; the residue of anger for being squelched as adolescents in their physical activities; and dismay that they ever "bought in" to the cultural

restrictions at all.

When these women discussed their current lives, it was with unanimous enthusiasm, high energy and a solid sense of self. All ten currently share strong, authentic voices that reflect their sense of positive self worth, a connection to others, and an ability to intertwine voice, mind, and self by creating their own frame of reference.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The following pages contain a photograph of the creative art piece (or photograph) that was sent or given to me by the eight tomboys who responded to the second portion of the interview process. I asked each to create a symbolic art piece, drawing, or photo, whatever they choose, that represents to them how they feel about having lived their lives as tomboys. I had intended to interview each tomboy for a verbal description of what this piece meant to them, but due to time constraints reported by many women, and the special request by most of them, we agreed to a change in format to allow them to write their feelings and descriptions in their own words.

One of the tomboys informed me she was swamped with work and preferred to meet when she was here on business, which we did, and her words are included in the analysis. The other tomboy never responded to my letters, phone message, or thank you gift, so her final story is not in this chapter.

The other eight responses are on the following pages. I have not changed a single word in these individual stories, believing it was best to let their words stand alone as a positive and powerful commentary on the pride they feel in having lived their lives as tomboys.



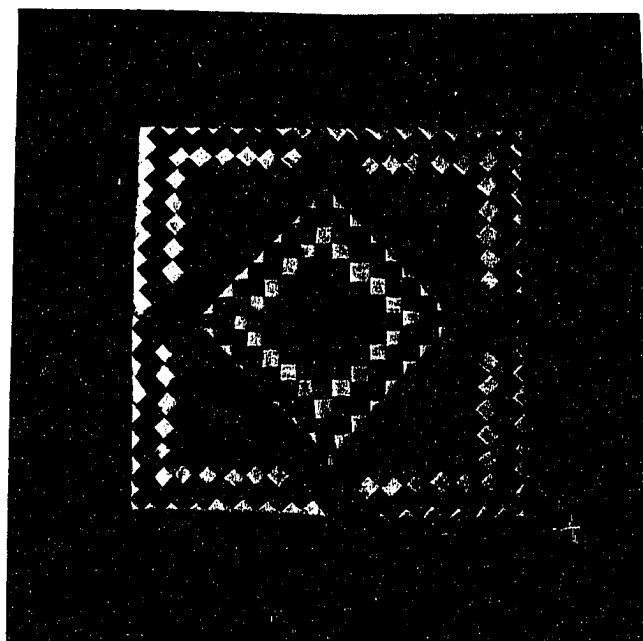
FURY

RE: My mandala...my pseudonym is Fury: I always identified with the horse, not the man or woman!

It's not complete, but neither am I. This mandala reflects my evolution toward an integration of my masculine and feminine, dark and light, strong and weak, simple and complex, silly and serious, cosmic and earthy, linear and random, and wild and tame. This integration is not simply a merging of the bipolarities but it is a blending of the two to create a third entity. Life to me is not about duality as western culture simplistically suggests; life is at the minimum a triumvirate of mind, body, spirit or earth, wind, and fire. The theme of the three is predominant to emphasize the limitation of perceiving our world as a reality defined by duality, polarity or opposites.

This mandala is filled with simple shapes and patterns to create a complex design indicative of how I see life. Leaves, planets, flames, tear drops, ovaries, DNA, labyrinths, and the red and green of masculine and feminine emerged as the earthy forms reflective of my tomboyish nature. The fact that the circle goes off the edge of the paper illustrates how I am not prepared to be only of the world. The tomboy in me is the part that has always defied the norm--been off the edge. It's the part of me that always questioned(s), and then often resents the answers I am given. The tomboy in me seeks complexity even if it means ambiguity.

Too many words used to describe this creation that emerged through me can diminish its meaning. Just as I do not want to be labeled and defined and described for other people's comfort or need for quantification I wish to leave further interpretation of my mandala to the observer. Our dialogue will then be through universal knowings--not words.



MICHAEL

This quilt is an Amish pattern called Sunshine and Shadow. The diamond in the center is symbolic of the feeling I had for many years of not belonging to either male or female groups. It is a sense of being different while not always knowing why. The diamond is complete and whole even though it "lives" within the larger pattern. I came to know this wholeness. The diamond is integral to the larger pattern symbolizing my later knowledge of my integrality even if I did not meet normal societal expectations. The colors range from muted to bright symbolizing the growth we experience, the times that are difficult and the times that are joyful. The different colors and shapes symbolize an awareness that we all fit into the whole and each has a valuable contribution.



ANNIE OAKLEY

I have chosen a photograph of this white Arabian horse as a symbol of my feelings of having lived my life as a tomboy. To me the horse represents one of the Earth's strongest, most independent and yet most adaptable creatures that Mother Nature has created. The Arabian is a special breed with unique talents and a reputation for stamina as well as stubbornness, and I feel living as a tomboy requires all these attributes. Like an Arabian, I carry my talents proudly, openly.

Strength is vital for life as a tomboy, and not only do I highly value my physical strength, and count on my body to perform whatever feats I ask of it, but I also take the best care I can of this physical housing by offering the proper food, rest, exercise and nurturance. The outer strength helps build confidence

that develops an inner strength, known in both people and horses. Although horses have temperaments as wide-ranging as people, the Arabian is well known for the ability to respond to others without losing a sense of itself. The Arabian can be a loyal and loving friend, just as I've learned to treasure valued friends and nurture my relationships with them. The Arabian also has a well-developed stubborn streak that appears whenever too much is asked of it, and occasionally my own stubborn streak rears up when I find myself on opposite wave lengths or facing intractability in others. In those situations I have been known to throw a well-aimed verbal kick, but mostly I prefer to turn tail and walk--or gallop--away, just as most sensible Arabians are known to do.

Independence is a well known trait in the Arabian line, and it has certainly been a part of my life as a tomboy. Being born a female in a male-dominated world forces one to either conform to cultural restrictions or rebel. I never chose the route of conformity, but found myself walking a well-worn path in early adulthood with traditional roles but with a non-traditional sense of the "maverick" lurking just under the surface, often bursting out in the most surprising moments to remind me of who I am. As an Arabian will shake it's head and stomp in annoyance at unreasonable requests, the maverick in me will do the same. My rebellions were subtle in my 20s and 30s, but increased with time until I planted my feet firmly and refused to conform to many of the cultural restrictions. Neither silence nor duty ruled my life for long. I am living noisily again, as I did in my youth, expressing myself freely, choosing which jumps I will hurtle, deciding to live only by the paths that nurture, not the paths that cripple. As any good horse

knows enough to strike out at danger, tomboys have to do the same thing. Self preservation runs deep, and is vital to my survival as a person. This is one asset the culture simply cannot break.

And yet adaptability is also one of my strongest assets, a force that seems to occur frequently in both tomboys and Arabians. Tomboys are adaptable in the sense that they walk within two worlds, one dictated by biology, the other created by positive influences and a determination not to lose a sense of self. I can play a semi-feminine role when I feel it is important, which, thank heavens, doesn't happen often. Having to wear nylons, heels and a dress can inspire the noisiest of all rebellions, and I usually refuse. The most natural looking hosiery, the lowest of heels, and skirts with brightly colored blazers are my only concession to a professional look in the work world. Since I consider adaptability as a tomboy asset and a strength, I will adapt when necessary, but one can usually find me living happily in jeans and sweat shirts or denim shirts without a thought to what I look like. I always felt the inside was more interesting than the outside.

Like the Arabian with its distinctive variety of gaits, I've discovered that walking in two worlds is more comfortable now, and becoming even more so. The Arabian also tends to adapt to new situations without losing it's cool demeanor, and as a tomboy I've attempted to do the same thing. The maverick still lurks, however, nudging me to stay true to myself. Perhaps that is my most important tomboy trait, independence and being true to who I am, inside and out.

The Arabian horse is definitely unique, with its classic-shaped nose, high head and tail carriage, and easy flow of movement. The uniqueness of tomboys

isn't so physically obvious, but I feel it's there nonetheless. I am comfortable with my physical movements, have a classic outlook on life which some feel is slightly off-beat (which I love to hear, and strive to inspire) and try to keep an easy and light-hearted flow through life. I relish new challenges, can still be dared to do almost anything within reason, and am carrying myself through life with a sense of success and accomplishment that increases with each year. And I relish the free rein that midlife has given me to continue this way.

An Arabian is best known for stamina, and is the one breed of horse that can be trained for covering long distances without breaking down. I pride myself on stamina, and have been known to push myself to exhaustion--sometimes just for the fun of completing a project or challenge to my satisfaction. It's a single-mindedness that has carried me through unusual challenges, heartbreaking events, and many exhilarating experiences. The part I fear most about the aging process is losing my dependable stamina, and I plan to resist slowing down as long as possible. I will not go down my aging path with docile step--I will prance and kick and rebel, just as any strong-willed Arabian thoroughbred would do.

Midlife is an exciting time for both tomboys and Arabians. When we have created environments where we are respected for who we are and what we stand for, and have thrown off restrictive reins to make our own decisions, we can gallop with anyone. Reining in a tomboy only creates more rebellion--thus I plan to gallop freely and cheerfully through the rest of this marvelous tomboy life.



SINCLAIR

How being a "tomboy" relates to my life now. . .

Denim. . .

Blue jeans. . .

Attitude. . . Self Confidence. . .

I feel that I am finally coming full circle to now be myself--act and think as I feel, not just because "that's what a girl should do or say." Have self confidence and stand up for myself.

Clothes--blue jeans in particular make me feel like the "tomboy" I used to know, used to be. Comfortable, sure of self, not trying to be somebody I'm not. A feeling of "Hey, this is me--not what someone else thinks I should be just because I'm a girl."

My love for the outdoors is also part of the tomboy in me that as growing up always preferred to be playing outside bike riding, playing sports, working in the yard, walking in my grandfather's fields, crabbing off my grandfather's pier. .
.now have reached a re-connected comfortable place to just be me.



SYDNEY

The photograph that I've chosen to represent who I am today represents the "connectedness" I feel with my family, friends, and the natural landscape. My husband is the photographer for this family college graduation portrait with the Rockies as splendid backdrop. He is not visible in this photo, but he is definitely a very integral part of my world. I chose this family grouping instead of an individual portrait of me because I know that I am an "individual" with the good fortune of being part of the fabric of a supportive family. I choose to be connected, aware, sensitive. I choose to be a daughter, sister, partner, mother and friend as well as a concerned individual who relishes and is concerned for our natural environment.

I can also say, without contradiction, that I am my own "person." I think

that's what being a "midlife tomboy" implies for me. I like who I am. I am comfortable with myself. I am a woman who lives life on her own terms: I dress comfortably and simply, my shoes are flat and my nails are unpainted. I do what I enjoy, yet I honor my responsibilities. I nurture relationships. I have wide-ranging interests that make life exciting!

At midlife, I know that I am a person with a track record of valuable life experience. My admiration for my parents and folks my own age and older increases daily. I am pleased that my two boys have a healthy respect for women as intelligent, competent, caring, fun-loving "persons." I derive much satisfaction from the fact that I, with my "tomboy" strong sense of self, have contributed to that aspect of their total being. They are my contribution (with help from my husband partner) to the enhancement of positive understanding between the sexes!

I am now poised to embrace more fully my interests and connections since my two young men are fairly self sufficient. I look forward to this next phase of my life with anticipation and confidence, with friends and family to share and enjoy!



SARAH

Perhaps my symbolic object of my being a tomboy in midlife lacks imagination, but I feel it truly represents what I always have been and what I am now. My HOUSE is uncomplicated, open, airy, sturdy, tailored and surrounded by nature. These adjectives also describe who I am and what I believe Tomboys at any age to be.

The many windows provide not only light and lovely views of nature but also represent, to me, an openness to new ideas. The house has withstood earthquakes as well as various hardships related to raising children in this age of temptation. The decor of my house is simple and tailored. There are few frills, ruffles, or glitz. This reflects my taste and lifestyle.

The house is in the hills and close to things I enjoy, namely the outdoors.

I need only to walk out the front door and I can begin a long hike and enjoy the birds, deer, and oak trees. These are the things I enjoy as a person and as a tomboy.

My house has also gone through many changes. . .just as I have. It has been remodeled three times to reflect my changing and maturing attitudes. I feel that my home is my personality. I am secure, strong, safe, very happy and always open to change.

Basically, I am what I always was only older and maybe a little wiser. I cannot imagine not being a tomboy at any age. I think being a tomboy has helped me share in things my husband enjoys thus making our life together more enjoyable and fulfilling.

In closing, it becomes obvious that I am a person of few words. I hope this is helpful in concluding my part in your study.



LYNN

[This is] the photo that I feel represents who I am in my life today as midlife tomboy. I would have liked to enclose a photo of me leading treks in the Andes of Amazon, but I don't have any available. The enclosed photo was taken in Saraguro, Ecuador, in November, 1994. The families of my godchildren dressed me up in traditional costume and we all laughed at the result. I have my hand over my mouth in unconscious imitation of the local custom which dictates that females don't show their teeth when they laugh.

The larger significance of the photo in terms of being a tomboy is that once active, always active (or so I believe). There are no roads into many of these communities and I credit being a tomboy with still being in shape. In fact, I find it appalling the number of midlife women I know [who] probably couldn't hike

into these communities. (And they aren't even long hikes, half-an-hour to several hours.)

Also, the photo represents adventure. I find it amazing and wonderful that I am in a profession, anthropology, where I get paid to have adventures, to wander off the beaten path, to go to interesting places and meet interesting people. The confidence to do this comes, at least in part, from feeling comfortable with my body and what it can do, the result of a physically active childhood. I'm not afraid to head up steep mountain trails, teeter across log bridges, climb trees, crawl under or over barbed wire fences, leap streams, or rappel off a cliff, because I did those things (or similar kinds of things) as a child. And really, that about covers it.



JAN BRUNER, Ph.D.

"TOMBOY AND THE DOUBLE DELIGHT"

Tomboy is a study in movement, complexity, multiple activities and roles. It is a life that is unconfined by walls and finds its place in nature. The symbols contained within this piece begin with the image of a woman with windblown hair suspended between mountains, desert, sky or ocean, and garden. Issuing from the profile itself is a stream (also may be seen as a roadway, or breath) that combines the ancient petroglyph symbol for water, musical notes and the symbol for psychology. The stream appears to reach its culmination in a bouquet of Double Delight roses in the lower right corner.

In order to allow the unconscious to have free rein in the design of this silk painting, I neither planned nor edited the piece. It developed itself.

Interpretation was done at a later time when I had gained some psychological distance.

I used a Cameo I found in Rome (while on international lecture tour) as a model for the profile. I was told by the artist that the image represented Athena, Goddess of Knowledge. For the purpose of this piece, however, I include Diana, Goddess of the Hunt-Protector of Women, and Aphrodite, Goddess of Love and Creativity, along with the intellectual Athenian image.

As the Athenian woman I have spent a good deal of my life in pursuit of knowledge, and continue to do so through research, reading, and attending conferences. My home is constantly under siege and threatened impending take-over from marauding books and journals that cover diverse fields from Anthropology, Psychology, Geology, Physiology, or Medicine, to name a few. I also continue to study music which was my first major in undergraduate school.

In the psychological persona of Diana combined with the Athenian quest for knowledge, I am the protector of women in my private practice, encouraging their assertive growth and development. (I have pulled battered women from telephone booths at two a.m. after emergency calls, to get them to safety.) As the athletic Diana, I use physical activity to ground and rejuvenate myself. I bicycle, white water raft, cross country ski, power walk, and dance. Yoga is used both as a meditative expression as well as physical release. I encourage clients to engage in regular aerobic exercise as part of their treatment programs.

Aphrodite, the Goddess of Creativity, has the constant, unrelenting demand on my attention, extracting her due in the form of listlessness or

despondency if I do not find a way to express her productive drive. Currently, I play in a concert band, and am just beginning the study of painting. I have designed and maintain a large garden. Aphrodite is also the Goddess that creates connection with others. I see the complexity of her energy with that of the two previously mentioned Goddesses as I work with clients, frequently through an artistic means, to heal old wounds from their lives. I also am gifted with deep long-term friendships with both women and men.

The head dress and hair swept around the silhouette are almost those of a gypsy, or nomad that might be travelling through the windy desert. I saw them as a child, coming through town during Helderado, or Hell's Rodeo, in their wagons, children trailing along on mother's long cloaks like puppies on a leash. Internally my gypsy pushes me to explore other subcultures within our own, other cultures, countries and continents. However, the restlessness also kept me from establishing a home base for myself. It is only quite recently that I have begin to build a home, previously living as though I were ready to spring from my environment and into a new one at a moment's notice. This putting down of roots started on the exterior of my home, with building a garden, and has moved slowly to the interior, initially encroaching on the ground floor. I would like to add that the intellectual and cross cultural exploration has continued delightfully unabated.

As we step back further from the piece a few more things become apparent. First it seems almost divided by what appears to be a river or road that emerges from behind the figure's mouth, or might be interpreted as a breath

issuing from it. Contained in this sinuous figure are emblems ranging from ancient American Indian symbols for water, musical notes in the center, and Psychology's emblem on the bottom.

One cannot help but notice that the ancient water symbol is closest in proximity to the image of desert buttes that float in the upper right portion of the picture, a position symbolizing its past and transcendent qualities. My birthplace was the Mojave Desert where my family lived on a small farm. It was here I developed my love of gardening and communion with nature. On the long hot days of summer, after morning watering chores were finished and I settled into the deep inky shade of an elm tree, surrounding mountains seemed to float on shimmering mirage lakes. This became the perfect environment for me to begin an entrancing inner journey into the psyche. Out of these subterranean travels I could come to an inner sense and understanding of my Spirituality. Hence the desert in this picture floats at the top of the frame on an ephemeral lake, positioned forward to back of the picture as it lies in the past, transcendent, and unconscious part of my psyche.

The center of the roadway represents the middle portion of my life. It is composed of music and the performing arts. As you know I put myself through graduate school as a dancer, high fashion model, I did television commercials, and performed as a vocalist. I continue to have music and the performing arts running through the center of my life as I study flute, the visual arts or dance. I must add that they no longer hold such a large portion of my time and attention.

Psychology symbols float through the bottom portion of the road and are

closest to the green mountains and blue skies of my adulthood. My practice has been the dominant feature for fifteen years now and has provided me with a deeply engaging field of interest, interpersonal, intellectual contact, and continuing challenge. It also has provided me with a sense of contributing to society in a meaningful fashion. This is of particular importance to me since I have no children of my own; it has provided a healthy outlet for the nurturer.

Directly under the profile, and juxtaposition to the psychological stream is an image of mountains. It is in the mountains that I go to find grounding and rejuvenation after periods of intense activity. The mountains belong not only in the current time of my daily life, they support the psyche that appears suspended above.

In combination of all these, the symbols from the Cameo/gypsy, the desert, the mountains, Indian Petroglyph markings, music and psychology flow together to nourish the rose called Double Delight. This picture does not do justice to this beautiful rose that, in springtime, is white and pristine in the center with deep crimson edging its petals. Double Delight's fragrance is second to none. It's blooms are different from spring, to summer, to early winter, starting with striking contrasts early in the blooming year and finishing with muted tones of cream blushed with a pink ruffle at the edges. It is this rose, the Double Delight, that in its blooming year, best portrays what it is to have an androgynous Tomboy life filled with learning, activity, creativity, and deep interpersonal contact. It is a life that starts with bright contrasts and develops complexity and subtleties based on living and experience with the years.

CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Storytelling is a traditional and culturally honored method for discovering identity by clarifying past experiences and redefining future paths. As Lieblich and Josselyn (1994) wrote, "We strive to give our lives coherence not only in the stories we tell about ourselves but also in the way we tell them" (p.214). The ten storytellers in this study eagerly narrated the experiences of their continually unfolding lives, from early childhood to current midlife, in an honest exploration of the experiences that helped clarify the paths they have chosen.

These tomboy adventures have been woven into a composite portrait that unites the journeys of the ten participants. The name Morgan was selected in an attempt to find a relatively genderless name reflecting the dual natures of these tomboys. Morgan's composite story was created to illustrate the challenges Morgan and her tomboy friends have faced in their lives to this point and to represent, in narrative form, the findings of this research.

Morgan: A Composite Tomboy

Morgan began childhood perched in the center of a bridge that connected the specific male and female roles her culture had assigned to each gender. Morgan preferred to have both feet firmly planted in the male environment, the physically active, culturally prescribed independent side of her world.

Occasionally she was pushed so that her other foot was touching--reluctantly, not firmly planted--in the female, the culturally prescribed dependent side of her world. Morgan's life challenges have been to balance herself between the two worlds. This has not been an easy task.

Morgan was born in the 1940s when the world was strictly divided into social roles assigned by gender. Her identity was imprinted throughout the early years by a family who accepted and encouraged her love of physical activity and her competitive spirit. In early childhood she participated in many recreational sports with the boys, but by late grade school she was banned from their playing fields. Morgan felt this loss keenly, and although she was able to find a few activities that challenged her physically, the lack of opportunity for team sports planted seeds of resentment that have remained all her life. She had roamed freely in her unrestricted environment during those early years, exploring both worlds, but preferred to spend most her time in the socially sanctioned independent, male-oriented sphere of physical activity that nourished her sense of well-being. She occasionally stepped, ever so reluctantly, into the domestic world of her mother and female relatives, but found it uninteresting, and usually ran back to the other side as quickly as possible.

The atmosphere of junior high school was a shock to Morgan, and she felt her world closing in, squeezing off her favorite adventures. Suddenly she was shoved out of her comfort zone, her freewheeling and energetic physical world, simply because of her gender. She was told by almost everyone, peers, extended family members, teachers, school authorities, and religious figures, to

march her budding female body back across that bridge and walk solely in the socially prescribed female world. Her life assignment was to learn the appropriate skills she would need for her role as a helpmate to her more important future spouse.

Morgan's responses wavered between outright rebellion and deep depression. During this time, however, Morgan had a strong ally in her family, and she listened even more seriously to his messages. "Be yourself," her father or older brother said. "You can do anything you want to do. You're smart, don't let anyone stop you." Morgan etched these words onto her heart as a constant encouragement to remain true to herself. She stayed outdoors as much as possible, seeking level playing fields where she could compete as an equal. She explored fencing, tennis, swimming, and competing in local horse shows. Sometimes subtle, sometimes with boisterous defiance, Morgan continued to nourish her competitive spirit in whatever activity she could find.

Morgan continued to seek allies among the girls in her neighborhood and classes. When she discovered adolescent friends turning their attention to fingernail polish, make-up, and the all-important lessons of how to kiss, catch and marry boys, Morgan deliberately sought out girls who preferred energetic activities and spoke her same language. These determined bands of girls formed their own teams and created their own activities. They took long bike rides, or wandering hikes with boxed lunches, and made pacts to never change who they were. They met for horseback rides. They explored sports that demanded finesse and brains, not physical brawn, and thrilled to each success.

But underneath this activity Morgan and her friends often wept in frustration at the artificial boundaries imposed on them from all directions. Morgan occasionally wondered if there was something wrong with her, something genetic, that had caused a malfunction in her ability to be a "real" girl, yet knew she wanted little of that artificial world. Her buoyant spirit returned only when her father or older brother told her she was just fine the way she was, hang on, things would get better. Morgan's mother played a confusing role in this early adolescent phase, for although she had been supportive in the early years, she now gave mixed messages. Yes, she had encouraged Morgan to be a little daredevil and sports lover when younger, but Morgan was growing up. She had curvy hips. She had sprouted breasts. The message now came from her mother as well as from the culture: it was time to act more ladylike.

Morgan refused. She clung to her jeans and baggy shirts and put on a dress--the dreaded dress that limited most activity and forced her to sit with her knees together--only when she absolutely had to. When she was taken to the store to buy her first pair of high heels the humiliation was complete. How can I climb my favorite tree, or play baseball, Morgan wondered, in this stupid get-up?

High school was a better school environment, not as humbling as junior high school because Morgan was figuring out how to survive the system. Morgan realized that although she was limited in her sports outlets, no one could stop her intellectually. She threw herself into the scholastic demands and often scored higher grades than the boys. Morgan and her select friends refused to accept what one friend called "The Stupid Disease" and worked hard in their

classes. She joined clubs, ran for class office, and channeled her natural enthusiasm into new areas. She tried out for the cheerleading squad, was selected, but only stayed for a short time because she could see no sense in leaping around the sidelines cheering for someone else. She became an enthusiastic guard on the girls basketball team, played tennis, and threw herself into those sports for the pure joy of physical activity. She was able to stand on the middle of her bridge again, moving freely back and forth as her energy and desire allowed. Only when faced with the required Home Economic course--definitely on the wrong side of the bridge--did she balk noisily so she could take shop instead.

College began with new freedoms and new friends, but Morgan quickly had another door slammed in her face when she received the message, both overtly and covertly, that girls were second class students. Intellectually inferior? Never! Morgan knew better. She knew she was strong academically, but the college advisors discouraged her from many majors and professors frequently discouraged her intellectual curiosity. A women's college would have been much better, she often thought. There would be no male classmates dominating the discussions and implying how incompetent she was. The final realization of her second class status in society was another frustrating discouragement.

Morgan continued to seek out a strong support group of like-minded friends, whose company she often chose over "prissy" girls or domineering boys. She did like boys. She liked them a lot. She enjoyed their energy, their high spirits, their direct communication and camaraderie, their freedom to engage in

all sports. Morgan thought she would marry some day, perhaps even have children. She knew that decision would force her onto the female side of the bridge, but she also thought it would be an exciting challenge for the future.

Morgan realized that balancing in the middle of her bridge was vitally important to her mental and physical health. After college graduation she began working for a local business and contemplated returning to school for an advanced degree. She was comfortable with both men and women in her job, although she frequently chafed at the hierarchal structure of the male dominated workplace. Her competitive nature helped her survive many difficult moments, but she occasionally found herself being chastised for outspoken and unladylike behavior. This didn't bother her as long as she felt she was balancing in the middle of her bridge; it was when others tried to force her onto a lopsided path that caused pain and confusion.

Morgan did marry, and had children. She realized later, when the children were in grade school, that, as feared, she had slipped off the bridge and landed squarely, both feet buried deep, in female country. She occasionally leapt over to the other side to nourish her independence, usually by taking up a new sport or creative hobby. Teaching her children to ride bikes, swim, and kick a soccer ball also helped nourish her spirit. She watched her tomboy friends spend time in each world, but quite a few years were spent, as she later said, "selling out."

Eventually Morgan started reading, avoiding the standard romance literature genre and searching out books about women's lives, women's history, women's psychology. She never questioned her sexual preference, and was

surprised to read that being a tomboy in the current climate is often interpreted as being a lesbian. In her world, this was never an issue. She knew tomboys and she knew lesbians, but never felt they were synonymous. She recognized the changing cultural climate, however, with the open discussions of same-gender relationships, and felt that this might explain why none of her friends had talked about being tomboys after high school.

Morgan was convinced there was a wide range of physical energy found in all mammals, and that tomboys fall well within the human range. Active play, wrestling, running, climbing, leaping, are all accepted and normal behavior. To be squelched, reined in by outside forces, was *not* normal. Morgan decided the culture had it backwards--the tomboys lived the "normal" life, not the sedentary girls! It was a complete reversal of what she had been taught. Then she read another book, Tillie Olsen's *Silences* (1983), and found the quote:

Sparse indeed is the literature on the denial to small girl children of the development of their endowment as born human: active, vigorous bodies; exercise the power to do, to make, to investigate, to invent, to conquer obstacles, to resist violations of the self. Little has been written on the harms of instilling constant concern with appearance; the need to please, to support; the training in acceptance, deferring. (p. 46-47)

With pain and sadness, Morgan realized what she had lost. She shared her frustrations with other tomboys. She continued to read, talked to those who would listen, and finally was able to recapture the strong sense of self she remembered from her childhood.

Morgan is in midlife now, reveling in the balance of her life. She is convinced her career experiences have been greatly enhanced by her deep understanding of both the male and the female worlds. Throughout her professional life she has held onto a measure of competitiveness, finely tuned in childhood and serving her well in the working world. The cultural restrictions have begun to fade in a changing social climate, along with the relaxing of rigid expectations and the re-assessment of social roles that accompanies midlife.

Morgan often thinks of the family crises that pushed her into this stage, and saw many feminine friends divorced, widowed, left alone in empty houses mourning faded looks, or trying to find satisfying employment. Her tomboy friends have the same marriage and divorce statistics as everyone else, but Morgan sees these friends as mostly relieved and comfortable now that they are no longer expected to fit into a male concept of attractiveness. Proud of a still energetic body, Morgan decided this may be her best and most free time of all.

Being a tomboy, she feels, has many advantages, as well as some deeply painful disadvantages. Morgan thinks the secret to having a strong sense of self, and pride in having confidence in one's own voice, is balance. Being able to move freely across the bridge, understanding both worlds and choosing the best of each, creates a healthy and nourishing personality. For now Morgan is standing firmly in the middle of her bridge, comfortable with herself and her choices. She refuses to be forced into a lopsided world again.

Would she choose to live the same challenging tomboy life again?

Absolutely.

Summary of Findings

As Morgan's story illustrates, the findings of this study offered a pattern of challenges that differed in each life stage. Some of these challenges were consistent with those of other women growing up in the same time frame and culture; other challenges seem to be unique to these tomboy women.

Childhood

Early childhood for these women set the patterns of "doing my own thing," of "having more guts and more creativity" than other girls their age. They were physically active and laughed often as they bragged about "beating the pants off every boy" in the school or neighborhood. Often known as being feisty and as "resident hellions", they seemed to treasure their rebellious reputations. They surrounded themselves with athletic friends and spent free moments reveling in outdoor activities. These ten women frolicked through exuberant, light-hearted, physically expressive childhoods without memories of limitations or restrictions of having been "squelched." Both the language and the wide smiles offered confirmation that these women had truly memorable childhood years.

Adolescence

Adolescence seemed to sneak up on these women, jolting them into the awareness that they "did not fit into social norms." They could not relate to the "prissy" girls, and lost many male "buddies" in the changing climate dictated by hormones and the pressures to date. Most the tomboys admitted they "went through some times that were really rough," and used words like "feeling lost," or "drowning, unable to breathe" or "abandoned" by the cultural system, and

"angry--often furious" at what they thought were "completely unreasonable" restrictions. Two tomboys, however, sailed through their teenage years with the attitude of, "This is who I am, take it or leave it." They insist they have never, at any time in their journeys, lost a sense of identity or strengths, and the paths they have chosen indicate these strengths are almost second nature to them.

Competitive streaks were squelched in most high school athletic arenas designed only for males, so these tomboys channeled their energy into academics. Several tomboys were newspaper editors; many of them won student body offices. All produced solid grades that propelled them into four year colleges. "You have to compete to learn," insisted one tomboy, as she ridiculed "The Stupid Disease" that infected so many adolescent girls and often carried over into adulthood. "Dummy down? Not a chance!" was the standard response to the cultural expectation not to surpass the males in the classroom or athletics. The social pressures to adopt the role of being "beautiful and dutiful" was appalling to them, and although several of them decided they needed to walk a more feminine path, they recognized that they were "buying into the system" by doing so. It was a false and frustrating experience; within a few years they chaffed at the restrictions and burst out as soon as they felt comfortable to do so.

Early Adulthood

Early adulthood was characterized by these tomboys as being in their "most traditional feminine" stage, trying to balance the desire for healthy marital relationships and family with the inner voices urging them to recapture their

earlier sense of independence and identity. Two tomboys reported never losing their independent attributes. They "loved being different, confident, determined." All ten tomboys in this study had regained their strong sense of self by their middle or late thirties and each reported refusing to "sell out" after that time.

Balancing their dual natures became more important than social restrictions, and many chose careers or professional positions that allowed them to associate with both genders so they could continue to "walk with one foot in each world." They were comfortable speaking a language that reflected their understanding of both male and female natures. Their sense of competitiveness and love of the outdoors created "better partners and better mothers" as well as encouraging them to believe they could survive regardless of the changes and challenges they faced in the future.

Midlife

"I'm back to being an absolute rascal!" laughed one tomboy, arms spread wide as she described her current midlife stage. The other tomboys echoed her sentiments. They are "doing pranks", feeling "myself again, free and loving it." They described their personalities as being "strong, wholesome, All-American, independent." Each tomboy laughed often and easily during the interviews, often commenting that tomboys "have a better sense of humor, about themselves and everything else."

Many reported having developed more understanding and respect for other women and the choices they have made, but have maintained their outspoken criticism of a cultural system that encourages--almost forces-- young

women to become "ultrafeminine" thus "selling their souls" to the "dehumanizing cultural expectations." Not one of these tomboys is shy about discussing her opinions, and each woman is comfortable "telling it like it is" in a public forum without being concerned about ridicule or ostracism.

These women began to mention their mothers as they discussed their current midlife journeys. Several expressed regret that the opportunities have been lost (from illness or death) to truly understand their mother's strengths and talents; two spoke of missing chances to learn about family history. Others reported a strengthened connection and communication with their mothers. None of these women seem to regret focusing on homemaker roles in their younger years, however, and apparently there will be no domestic awards for these tomboys. They may bake or cook when they have to, but most of them indicated with frequent and irreverent humor that they would much rather ride bikes or hike off to new outdoor adventures with family and friends than be "locked up" in the kitchen.

Each tomboy offered exuberant expressions of being so happy about having lived as a tomboy that she would gladly choose (if she had the option) to live as a tomboy again. "I would absolutely do it over again, and probably with a lot greater vengeance!" laughed one. Another added, "I had a stronger sense of self and a stronger sense of what was right for me than my feminine friends."

These midlife tomboy women have returned to a world of their own making, and are relishing their renewed ability to have "complete access to both worlds and choose the best of what [is] available." Their chorus was in perfect

harmony as they agreed that living their lives as tomboys has been an interesting, challenging, exciting way of life. They "absolutely wouldn't do it any other way."

Summary of Objectives

There were three primary objectives to this study. The first was to obtain descriptive narratives in an attempt to understand significant influences on the lives of these tomboys. Although the time frame was limited, each woman eagerly discussed the influences of her life with emotions ranging from high humor to flashes of anger and sadness. They expressed keen awareness of the cultural restrictions they had faced both as adolescents and adults, and spoke wistfully of the current social climate for young women today who have expanded opportunities to participate in sports activities and dress in casual styles.

The second objective was to examine experiential themes that emerged from these narratives to learn if these women believed they have moved beyond gender-based cultural boundaries or have reclaimed their feelings of self-ownership in midlife. The answers were an overwhelming YES on both counts. The themes that emerged showed that these women not only have moved beyond gender-based restrictions, but most of them felt they never completely "bought in" to these restrictions when they were younger. Adolescence for these tomboys was often difficult, but they claimed that the strengths from their free-wheeling childhoods, and positive male support from families, helped them maintain a stronger sense of self during their adolescent years than many of their feminine counterparts.

Buckling under to social restrictions was a difficult assignment, and most tomboys refused to be subordinated by physical and intellectual limitations. If one door slammed, they searched for one that was open. If they did accept limitations, it was only for a few short years. Two women never "bought in" at all, and have maintained a sense of independence and authenticity, as well as a powerful, almost stubborn confidence in their own abilities, for their entire lives. The solid and long lasting feelings of maintaining self-ownership, a sense of self, an authentic voice, and feelings of being unique, are sturdy and brightly colored threads in the fabric of these women's lives.

The third objective was to create a portrait of these midlife women that helps us understand their experiences as they journeyed from adolescent tomboys to midlife women. Their individual portraits, woven into the themes and subthemes of this narrative, offer colorful insights depicting their journeys. They laughed easily about fighting the "Stupid Disease" and remained indignant over having to wear the dreaded dresses. They spoke proudly of their independence and refusal to accept subordination. Their anger flared with memories of closed doors, particularly during the college years. Athletic activities are still welcomed, and a love of the outdoors remains a powerful force. These women value their independent natures, and are determined to keep walking with one foot in each world. Morgan, the composite tomboy, honors each woman in this study by standing tall, determined, and proud of the strengths in her portrait.

All three of the above-mentioned objectives were met with a range of humor, enthusiasm, curiosity, and a few poignant, even tearful, memories. As

Morgan's story indicates, the lives of these women have had conflicting moments of freedom, joy, pain, confusion, restriction, and outright rebellion, but throughout their journeys there is a strong sense of these women having lived as mavericks, as enthusiastic rebels within the cultural system. The threads of individuality, a strong sense of self, and a pride in their dual natures are tightly woven into their adventures. Their lives reflected the 13th Century description of a tomboy being a young woman who is possessed by an "imp" or "spirit," and they fit the current dictionary description that a tomboy is a girl who acts in a boyish or physically active manner. They didn't always like the term "tomboy," but clearly rejoiced in their adventuresome natures. For these women, being a tomboy is not confined to certain life stages, but appears to be a lifetime identity of "being the one who is willing to honor her soul."

Implications

The most profound implication of this study is that tomboys appear to live out a separate and centuries old archetype. As I became deeply immersed in the tomboy stories, and discovered that these women had similar, almost identical, language, memories, and experiences, I began to recognize the patterns of an archetype.

Archetypes can be found in literature, art, fairy tales, mythology, and education. Some common examples are Magician, Wise Man, Great Mother, Gods and Goddesses, King, Queen, Hero, Trickster, and Wicked Witch. Psychologist Carl Jung wrote extensively about the concept of archetypes, which

are "inborn psychic predispositions to perception, emotion and behavior" (Corsini and Wedding, 1989, p. 127). Archetypes fit into the concept of the collective unconscious, which Jung formulated:

to account for common themes in myths and legends and human practices everywhere. It served as a way of showing the need, even of small children, to have a sense of family and tribe, to commune with the 2 million year old [person] within every person's psyche. (Noshpitz, 1972, p. 219)

Archetypes are considered to have a powerful impact on the development of personality, which includes the following four concepts: (1) the Shadow, representing a dark side, always the same gender, of what we do not wish to be; (2) the Anima and Animus, which is the balance of female and male, the female representing life forces of creation and connection to earth; the male side representing initiation of activity, energy, enthusiasm; (3) the Persona, the ability of a person to be flexible in adjusting reactions to the inner psychic world and the changing circumstances of the outside world; and (4) the Self, the archetype that recognizes our inborn traits and personalities and desires to achieve wholeness and meaning in our lives (Corsini & Wedding, 1989).

Applying these concepts to the findings of this study suggests that these midlife tomboys are living out a separate feminine archetype. The Shadow or dark side for these women is personified by other females, the feminine, frilly, "prissy" kind, who represent what these tomboys do not want to be. The Anima and Animus, female and male sides, which are often interpreted to be separate

in each sex, are actually present in all humans to differing degrees. Jung's search was always for balance and consistency, with psychological health as the reward. Unfortunately, our culture stresses gender differences and does not encourage development of a balanced nature in either gender. The tomboy women in this study, however, offered many examples of a seemingly inborn ability to balance both male archetypal attributes of initiation of activity, high energy, and enthusiasm with their female archetypal attributes of life forces of creation and connection to earth. The Self expresses the inborn desire to strive for wholeness and meaning in one's life, and it appears these tomboys were completely in touch with their inner selves during childhood, lost their way briefly in adolescence, but found the satisfaction of living true to their own natures in adulthood. The manner in which they described their journeys indicate they simply could not help but be who they were. They appear to represent a Tomboy Archetype, holding fast to a tomboy spirit that the culture could neither contain nor crush. This archetype reflects the ability of these tomboy women to live balanced lives in a decidedly unbalanced world.

Other archetypes relevant to this study of tomboys can be found in *Goddesses in Every Woman*, by Jean Bolen (1984), a practicing psychiatrist and Jungian analyst. Bolen felt Carl Jung's original writings of archetypes were limited in that they represented traditional male personality and behavioral patterns more than traditional female patterns. Bolen's discussions about goddesses as archetypal figures moved beyond these limitations to "provide an explanation for inconsistencies between women's behavior and Jung's theory of

psychological types" (p. 10).

Goddess figures from ancient Greek and Roman cultures were revered for many centuries until suppressed by patriarchal religious beliefs, but the goddess archetypes continue to be a popular and powerful resource for understanding women's psychological traits. Bolen discussed personality patterns of archetypal goddesses that she believes are within every woman to varying degrees and offers insights to both men and women interested in learning more about women's personalities.

Bolen described two goddesses, Artemis and Athena, whose personalities seem to resonate strongly with the findings of tomboys in this study. Artemis is Goddess of the Hunt, Protector of Wildlife, and most comfortable in the outdoors. She is

a girl with a streak of independence and a bent for exploration. She ventures into the woods, climbs hills, or wants to see what's in the next block and the block after that. 'Don't fence me in' and 'Don't tread on me' are her slogans (Bolen, p. 57).

Artemis is independent from birth, defiant when opposed, loves competition, often forms sisterly bonds with other women, and easily ignores criticism or restrictions. Midlife for Artemis women is often reflective, in which she tends to reconnect with unresolved issues of her early years and may explore new psychological or spiritual concepts. The tomboys in this study share this independent nature, enjoyment of the outdoors, love of competition, and willingness to ignore restrictions.

Athena is the Goddess of Wisdom, the Father's Daughter, known for her practical nature. Athena's wisdom can be seen in the competitive arenas of academia, business, science, and politics, and she is comfortable within the male environment. She is "practical, uncomplicated, unselfconscious, and confident, someone who gets things done without a fuss. Typically the Athena woman is in good health, has no mental conflicts, and is physically active" (Bolen, p. 84). She also thinks "most girls are silly and dumb" (p. 87). Athena women are typically not close to other women, tend not to share traditional feminine views, work well within patriarchal structures, and may harbor harsh feelings about other women. Midlife is considered her best time of life as she tends to move smoothly into her next challenges. Her self esteem is based on "intelligence, competence, and often indispensability . . . she is more powerful, useful, or influential in her middle years than as a young adult" (Bolen, p. 98). The tomboys in this study used many similar expressions when talking about the "silly girls", pride in physical activity, a desire to maintain good health, and all expressed confidence in their professional work within male dominated structures. Their enthusiasm for the current midlife stage appears boundless.

Although these archetypal examples may offer further understanding to this preliminary study of tomboys, a specific tomboy nature has neither been articulated nor examined in depth. For example, Sheehy's (1995) most recent book has only one sentence using the word "tomboy" in it, although the section in which it appears is entitled "Call of the Wild Girl" (p. 221). Estes (1992), did not mention tomboys specifically, but has clearly touched a resonant chord in

many women, tomboy or not, with her teaching and healing stories of the Wild Woman Archetype, which she compares to the wolf. The tomboy women of this study, with their high energy and determination to be true to their own natures, fit into Estes's mythology seamlessly. Estes wrote

A healthy woman is much like a wolf: robust, chock-full, strong life force, life-giving, territorially aware, inventive, loyal, roving. Yet, separation from the wildish nature causes a woman's personality to become meager, thin, ghostly, spectral. We are not meant to be puny with frail hair and inability to keep up, inability to chase, to birth, to create a life. (p. 12)

Estes also wrote that the Wild Woman is "busy with the work of invention, and that is the Wild Woman's main occupation" (p. 12). The tomboys in this study have also been busy with invention: the invention of their own lives in search of wholeness and meaning. In Estes's language, their tomboy souls were bright and dancing in childhood, suffered a great loss in adolescence when they learned the ways of the world and, in the process, lost touch with their natural soulful talents. Tomboys, as healthy Wild Women, fought to "use our instincts and find our way back home" (p. 157). This is how all women recapture their primary source of power: speaking in their own behalf. In the language of Jung, the tomboys honored the Self in their search for a healthy, balanced life. In the language of Bolen, tomboys have strong goddess qualities of both Athena and Artemis within their personalities. In the language of this study, tomboy women stay true to their selves and speak with an authentic voice.

A second major implication is that the continued cultural assignment of

women to second class status is firmly rejected the participants in this study. Women in our current culture continue to be "socially defined as unequals. . .designated second class" (Miller, 1986a, p. xxii). This inequality is reflected in the lack of status women have in our society and the lack of power they are able to wrest from the firm grip of males. Because of this permanent assignment to inferior status, based strictly on gender, women are treated differently, taught differently, and assigned what is considered lower status roles. This seems to be particularly upsetting to these ten tomboy women who refused to be squelched, openly rebelled as children and continue to do so throughout their adult lives. They retain a deep pride in being different from other females and refuse to accept a second class role.

There may be many, many women who began life with all the attributes these tomboys possess, but who allowed themselves to be subordinated by the culture. Although they would not be considered to fit the Tomboy Archetype, they perhaps would have developed healthier attitudes and self esteem if they were encouraged to develop according to their own natural gifts and talents and not subordinated into narrow expectations of the current society. But the cultural restricting process, which some say begins at birth, but which clearly begins in grade school and continues through high school and throughout adult life, appears to deeply and negatively affect many girls (Mann, 1994; Pipher, 1994). By the end of 12th grade many young women's test scores have fallen and their self esteem has plummeted (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Estes, 1992; Hancock, 1989; O'Reilly, 1994). Before leaving their teens many promising young women

seem to have been thoroughly squelched physically, mentally, and emotionally (Mann, 1994).

The tomboys in this study indicate that they were able to resist most of this squelching process. Their mental acuity remained high, as reflected by strong high school and college test scores and high grades, most likely from their love of competition. Physically, they simply could not be contained. Their dual nature, their understanding of both male and female natures, and their inescapable desire to live their lives according to their own predispositions is a powerful force that guides their choices.

This study supports much of the literature reporting the cultural restrictions placed on women, particularly teenagers. Pipher (1994) wrote about the independent young girls who buckled, painfully and tearfully, under the restrictions of adolescence, as did Dowling (1981), Gilligan, Rogers and Tolman (1991), Mann (1994), and Miller (1986a). The women in this study reported similar adolescent pressures. The difference in these women is that they noisily chaffed at the subordinating assignments and rebelled as often as possible. Rather than burst into tears in midlife when reflecting back to the freedom of the unrestricted childhoods, as reported by Sheehy (1995), these tomboy women exulted in their childhood freedoms. They treasured memories of an early escape from social restrictions to reclaim their identities and maintain an unrelenting determination to remain true to their tomboy natures for the rest of their lives. The Tomboy Archetype may simply be too strong to subordinate.

Women of all ages may find inspiration from this preliminary study and be

encouraged to expand their knowledge. Reading the stories of these tomboy women may help other women recognize shared struggles and gain insights for shaping their lives according to their own dictates, whether they fit the Tomboy Archetype or not. Challenging restrictive norms and establishing an authentic sense of self is an uphill road for most women in our current culture, and one does not have to be a tomboy to set an independent path.

The implications for both females and males would include potential benefits for personal partnerships and professional relationships, perhaps inspiring both genders to balance their natures in a productive manner. These tomboys appear to have, in their earlier years, little patience with ultra-feminine women and a strong preference for a more male style of communication and behavior. This lessened tolerance for certain females, and comfort with male communication and structure, may negatively impact their collaborative or supportive work styles. The opposite position may be held by tomboy women who are inspired to reach out to women who are disenfranchised by the current system because the tomboys, also, have often felt the same exclusions. The range of individual differences may indeed be wide and far-reaching.

These ten tomboys, however, currently in midlife, speak clearly and confidently about their professional knowledge and project a sense of self-assurance with themselves and an ease of communication with both genders. They feel particularly strong in their ability to bridge male and female communication styles in their work environments and communities. This "walking in both worlds" style is certainly not restricted to gender or age, but

since it appeared as a common tomboy trademark in this study, recognition of this communication pattern may be of benefit to many professional settings.

Recommendations

The current cultural patterns of subordinating women impacts everyone involved in the lives of both males and females: parents, extended families, teachers and school systems, coaches, counseling professions, businesses, religious organizations. The goal should be to encourage young girls to think for themselves, and develop the strength to make their own choices. Helping them develop independence, retain the self esteem of their childhoods, and question roles that stunt their emotional growth or inhibit their natural physical energy or abilities, is critical to their development. Encouraging young women to retain a strong sense of self is necessary for both physical and mental growth, and benefits all those with whom the young women is in contact. Recognizing the value of financial autonomy is a powerful theme for young girls who are growing into a world in which professional opportunities are slowly expanding for women. The financial demands on family life, and uncertainty of relationships, indicate that women need to pursue the education and work environment of their choice, respecting their individual talents and goals, in order to remain autonomous if necessary. These strengths will not only improve their own lives, but improve and inspire the lives of the women following in their footsteps.

The strongest recommendation is to families. Fathers and brothers need to recognize the important role they play in a girl's life. Their emotional support

and willingness to offer equal opportunities to girls sends the message that being female is a positive attribute, not negative. Raising girls to think the culture offers them equality is a lie, and may weaken a young woman's resolve to reach her potential as a healthy adult when she discovers that women are still not allowed to participate on a level playing field. Continued discrepancies in wages, inability of many women to reach higher echelons of businesses, and gender discrimination in educational, religious and community institutions is obvious; to tell young girls these patterns do not exist only sets her up for disappointment.

Mothers play an equally vital role in the development of their daughters, and should honor and validate the tomboy in her daughter and not follow cultural dictates by forcing her daughter into the narrow confines of stereotypical cultural roles--i.e. being beautiful and dutiful, silent and subordinate. Further exploration into how tomboy mothers feel about raising tomboy--or, more importantly, non-tomboy--daughters may offer significant knowledge that would help all young girls, tomboy or not, to be encouraged to develop according to their natural abilities and interests. Mothers are in a unique position to prevent the negative impact of the current backlash that is urging a return to the more restricted and subordinated gender roles of 30 years ago. For a young girl growing to adulthood in a male dominated culture, individual validation can be the first step towards health and wholeness. As Mann (1994) wrote, "For men and boys, the journey is away from dominance. For girls and women, the journey is toward empowerment. For both, the prize is the true joy that is found in relationships based on equality" (p. 281).

There are seven additional recommendations that have developed from this research. The first recommendation, to researchers interested in women's psychological development, is to expand this study to include tomboys of all ages, ethnic and demographic groups. Although ethnicity, socio-economic levels, and education were not criteria for the selection process of this study, all ten participants were Caucasian, considered to be in the middle socio-economic range, and have earned a college degree. Five women have graduate degrees. By expanding this study into all ethnic and socio-economic groups, and other educational levels, we will begin to gain a better understanding of this Tomboy Archetype and how we can best interact with each other. The African-American culture has a tradition of strong women's voices and manner; the Asian cultures tend to teach a gentle, almost subservient style. Latina women are often encouraged to view their femininity as a powerful asset. Would tomboys from these cultures create fireworks if they worked in the same environment, or would they understand and speak the same language? Honoring and valuing all cultural styles is an increasingly important challenge. Perhaps current younger women would not have to "wait thirty years to talk about" being a tomboy, or continue to face the unrelenting pressure to conform to someone else's notion of how a female should think and act.

A second recommendation is to further examine biological as well as cultural influences on tomboys of all ages to establish a greater understanding of the varied aspects and patterns of the Tomboy Archetype. The goal is to learn to respect differences, as most feminist research strives for, and not interpret the

results as women being "different" and "deficient," as has happened so often in past gender research. I recommend this research only if it is applied to our cultural understanding to increase understanding, tolerance, and acceptance, but *not* if the goal is to search for yet another female attribute that our patriarchal system thinks should be ridiculed, subordinated, or surgically altered.

Third, a recommendation primarily to socio-biologists and sports medicine researchers, is to examine the health and physical benefits of women who have lived their entire lives with a strong love of exercise and exploration of outdoor activities. This recommendation was inspired by a discussion with a participant who mentioned her impression that all of her midlife tomboy friends retained a slim physical figure. Her comment sparked more questions than answers. Is there any connection between body shape and tomboyism? Do most tomboys remain slender? Is there any correlation between adult weight control and being a tomboy? If tomboys are slim in their middle years, is it because of their love of physical activity, their preference for outdoor activity, their high energy level, or some combination of factors we know nothing about? And what are the health implications, if any, of these preferences? Findings from these studies may be transferable to both genders and all ages.

Fourth, I would recommend to higher educational systems, particularly those currently developing leadership programs, both undergraduate and graduate, that they examine and recognize the potential leadership qualities that tomboys may have with their deep understanding of our competitive world systems and the benefits of interdependence and collaboration, and their

understanding of male and female language styles. This may be an untapped source of training for future leaders in our country and should be included in discussions of both female and male attributes as well as writings of skills and attitudes needed for twenty-first century leadership.

Current writings on the future of leadership stress the need for a collaborative focus of shared leadership rather than the current hierarchal, top-down, positional structure. Astin and Leland (1991) base their definition on feminist philosophy that includes the concepts of interdependence and power employed as mutual energy, not for coercion or control. Their definition is: "Leadership is a process by which members of a group are empowered to work together synergistically toward a common goal or vision that will create change, transform institutions, and thus improve the quality of life" (p. 8). Tomboys seem particularly well suited to understand and work within a shared leadership environment with their understanding of both male and female communicative and behavioral styles, and this aspect deserves further research.

Cantor and Bernay (1992) interviewed twenty-five women who contributed to their concept of leadership with basic components of a Competent Self, Creative Aggression, and what they refer to as WomanPower. The Competent Self came from strong, positive male influences, particularly fathers, and this is certainly a common theme among the ten tomboys in this study. Cantor and Bernay's concept of Creative Aggression includes "taking initiative, leading others, and speaking out" (p. 26). This includes a comfort with one's own competitive nature, which appears to be a basic component of tomboys.

WomanPower is "the ability to get things done" (p. 39). The tomboys in this study did not "retreat from their early sense of power to achieve social approval" (p. 46). Comfort with the traditional male style of communication, talking easily among mixed groups, not being afraid to express an opinion in public (authentic voice), and love of competition all indicate strong leadership potential among tomboys. Further study would increase our understanding of the positive contributions tomboys may offer to the future of leadership.

A fifth recommendation is to the career counseling and personal therapy professions, urging them to recognize and respect the tomboy spirit that walks a different path than the socially prescribed female path. Advising tomboys to think or act in a manner that goes against their deepest instincts would be like throwing a shroud over their talents. An understanding of who tomboys are, and the independent nature they represent, should be an inspiration to others, particularly young girls and women. Perhaps a research project with the Myers-Briggs Interest Inventory would offer additional insight into personalities and contribute to our understanding of the Tomboy Archetype. Or more in-depth studies of tomboys of all ages to establish archetypal attributes that can be shared by everyone. This knowledge would enable guidance counselors to encourage students to look in appropriate and healthy directions that respond to personal talents instead of urging them to follow a course of study that fits a preconceived cultural notion of conformity. Careers that tap into tomboy strengths would be productive for both the individual and the organization in which she works.

These tomboy narratives should be recognized by the helping professions as offering valuable insights into "important social resources for creating and maintaining personal identity. . .for creating our internal, private sense of self and . . . for conveying that self to and negotiating that self with others" (Linde, 1993, p. 98). It can only be beneficial for the future of our society to have strong women speaking out in support of all others, male and female, all ages and ethnic backgrounds. Awareness of our increasingly multi-cultural society demands that we look to the future, recognize and respect individual identity and abilities, and help others to understand themselves, their different cultural backgrounds, and how they can best relate to others in their communities and work places.

My sixth recommendation is to sports coaches, teachers, and advisors, as they are the people working most closely with current and future athletes. Their close relationships offer a source of strength to young people working to improve their natural gifts, and I recommend they build an awareness of strengths of all women, not only tomboys, in an effort to further encourage the mental and physical health benefits that come from physical activity. Increasing numbers of men and women are proving that it is possible to refute gender role stereotypes, and lead satisfying lives by being true to their own natures. These tomboy journeys, understood and nurtured by coaches and teachers, would make a positive impact on future generations of girls by encouraging young tomboys--indeed, all women--to follow their natural instincts and abilities without fear of ridicule or criticism. These stories could have a powerful impact on all

men and women, encouraging them to be true to themselves and not to restrict natural talents because of artificial rules.

A seventh and final recommendation is that tomboy research be continued by other tomboys within the feminist research perspective of women studying women, using multiple research methods, and with an environment of trust established in the interview process. Also, both descriptive and interpretive methods are used to understand significant feelings and experiences, with a focus on non-hierarchical relationships (Harding, 1991). I recommend that this research be published in feminist literature to offer a public format for further dialogue and social change. Feminist research encourages the interviewer's voice to be included within the study, which turned out to be a powerful influence in this study. The fact that I am also a heterosexual midlife tomboy added a collaborative dimension to this study that cannot be ignored. The recognition that we shared many similar experiences, often mentioned as "Oh good, you're a tomboy too, you'll understand" immediately increased the participant's comfort level and willingness to share personal stories. Tomboy researchers would recognize the shared language, establish an environment of trust and support, and would most likely build a communication bridge from the first interview.

Conclusion

The narrative research study of ten midlife tomboy women has been a fascinating journey of discovery. Each woman in this study is unique, with her own individual style, manner of expression, and historical life experiences. Yet

each shares with the others a common history of having been a tomboy all her life. The words and phrases used to describe their journeys was virtually identical; the outrage at certain cultural restrictions followed the same patterns. The humor appeared at almost predictable places. Their individuality is easily apparent, but their voices speak a common language.

The unanimous enthusiasm for this research created an open environment for exploration. Their insights helped me understand their journeys, and the shared experiences seemed to help them recapture a pride in their unique natures. These women have not only survived, but have grown and thrived in a cultural system that tried to squelch their physical activity, dictate an inhibiting style of dress, destroy their self esteem, limit their career choices, and malign their very nature. These were challenges the restrictive culture could not win. The tomboy stories are creative, powerful, and inspiring. These lives are varied, challenging, satisfying, filled with energy and spirit. The Tomboy Archetype survives.

The overwhelming enthusiasm and interest demonstrated by the participants in this study has prompted this researcher to begin a study of tomboys of all ages in order to firmly substantiate that tomboy is truly a new archetype. The strength of the convictions and the determination of these ten women seems to echo the voices of their predecessors, and surely it must be so. "Once a tomboy, always a tomboy" "If you have to ask what a tomboy is, you aren't one." Being a tomboy is, for these women, a lifetime identity that they hold with great pride.

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APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS

NAME/AGE	MARITAL STATUS	BIRTH ORDER	EDUCATION
FURY - 44	D	<u>F</u> F	Ed.D
MICHAEL - 42	M	<u>F</u> M	MSN,B.A., R.N.
A.OAKLEY - 56	M	M <u>F</u> M	Ed.D (c)
SINCLAIR - 49	W, D	F <u>F</u>	B.S.
SYDNEY - 52	M	<u>F</u> F	B.S.
SARAH - 56	M	M <u>F</u>	B.A.
ELIZABETH - 56	D, R	M <u>F</u>	B.A.
LYNN - Late 40s	W	M <u>F</u> M F	Ph.D. (c)
SUE - 48	M	<u>F</u> F F	M.B.A.; CFA
JAN - Late 40s	M	M M M <u>F</u>	Ph.D.

M = Married
D = Divorced
R = Remarried
W = Widowed

APPENDIX B

University of San Diego
School of Education
CONSENT FORM

Jan Secrist, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Diego, is conducting a study of the voices of midlife tomboy women. The purpose of this research is to gain further insight into experiences of midlife women, including the exploration of feminine voices of identity and development of personal growth beyond traditional social roles.

As a respondent in this study I understand that I will participate in two individual interviews. The data collection will take no more than four weeks. I understand that my participation will involve little risk other than possible minor fatigue. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without risk or penalty.

I understand that this interview will be audio taped and transcribed for analysis, and that I have the choice to use my real name, remain anonymous or use a pseudonym. My choice for personal identity is:

_____ Please keep my identity confidential
 _____ Please use the pseudonym of _____
 _____ You may use my real name

I also understand that the finished document, after acceptance by the University of San Diego, will be published and will become part of public record.

There is no agreement, written or verbal, related to this study beyond that expressed on this consent form. Jan Secrist has explained the research project to me and answered my questions. I understand that I may contact Jan Secrist at any time at (619) 755-1050 if I have further questions.

I, the undersigned, understand the above explanations and, on that basis, I give consent to my voluntary participation in this research.

Signature of Participant

Date and Location

Signature of Researcher

Date

6/95

APPENDIX C
Voices of Midlife Tomboys: A Narrative Study
Jan Secrist - University of San Diego

1. WHAT DOES BEING A TOMBOY MEAN TO YOU?

2. HOW WAS YOUR JOURNEY INTO ADOLESCENCE AFFECTED BY YOUR
BEING A TOMBOY?

3. HOW IS YOUR JOURNEY INTO MIDLIFE BEING INFLUENCED BY YOUR BEING A TOMBOY?

4. WHAT INFLUENCES DID BEING A TOMBOY HAVE ON YOUR CHOICE OF CAREER AND THE DIRECTION YOUR CAREER HAS TAKEN?

APPENDIX D
Letter to participants explaining change in second interview format

October 23, 1995

Dear

Many thanks for your willingness to participate in my doctoral research with your time, enthusiasm and insightful responses! This has been an exciting project for me, mainly because of the dynamic women I've encountered and your ability to freely share of your interesting lives. Thank you, thank you!

The second interview was originally planned to be the same format as the first, with the addition of an object, photo, drawing, montage, or any physical creation that you selected or created that you feel represents who you are in your life today as a midlife tomboy. The interview would have been a discussion of how you feel the object or art piece relates to you as a tomboy.

Many participants have requested that they be able to write this information down instead of talking it out, giving them the opportunity to ponder it, think about it, and even edit their words as they put their thoughts on paper. If you are agreeable to this change, please send me your chosen object or art piece and a written description of any length of how you feel about being a midlife tomboy and how this object represents those feelings. Of course I will reimburse you for all mailing expenses, and will return your materials within two weeks of their arrival. I do need to ask to have this information in my home by November 15, 1995. This will give me time for write-up and analysis and allow me to remain within my dissertation time frame.

Thank you again! I deeply appreciate your participation and look forward to seeing our Tomboy Adventures in final written form. This is the first study to focus exclusively on tomboys--we're making history!

Sincerely,

Jan Secrist